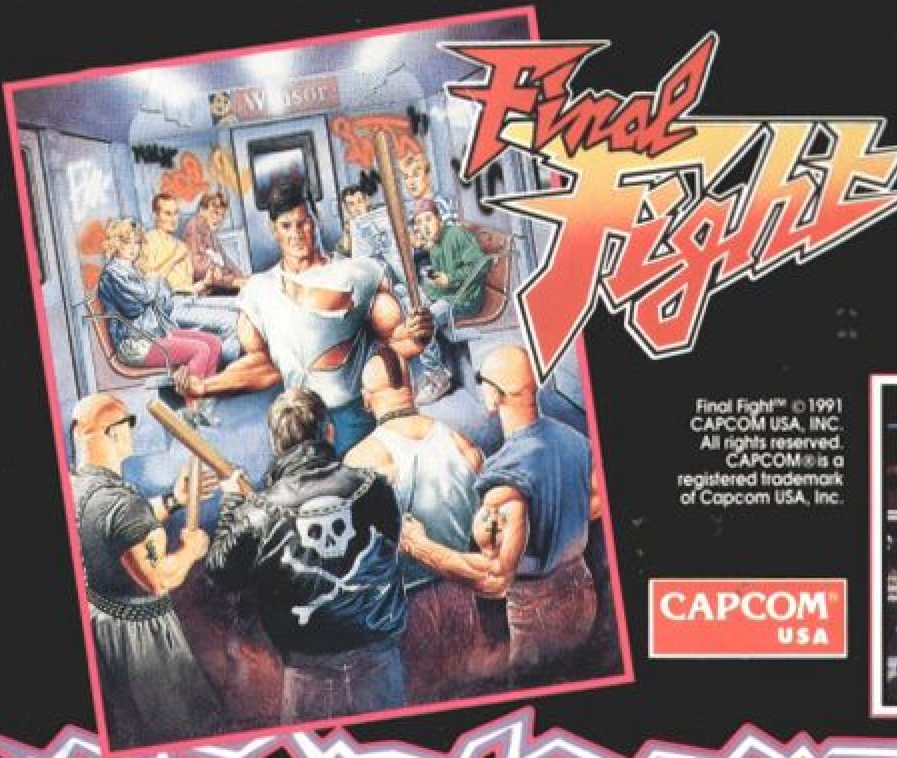

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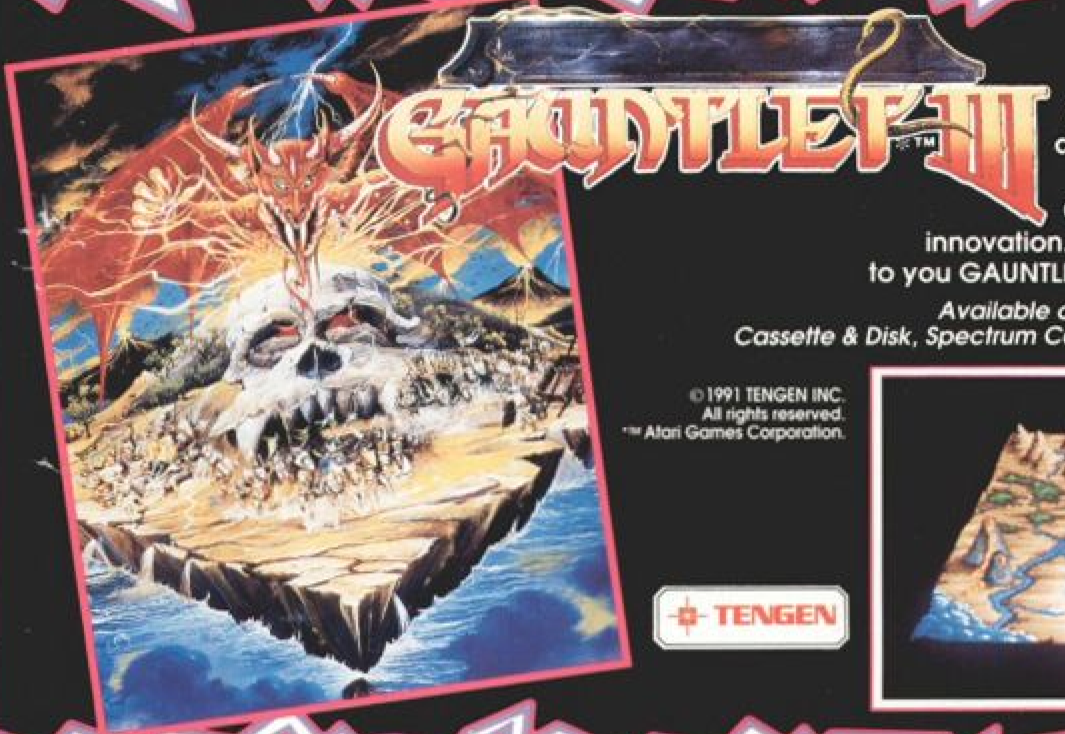

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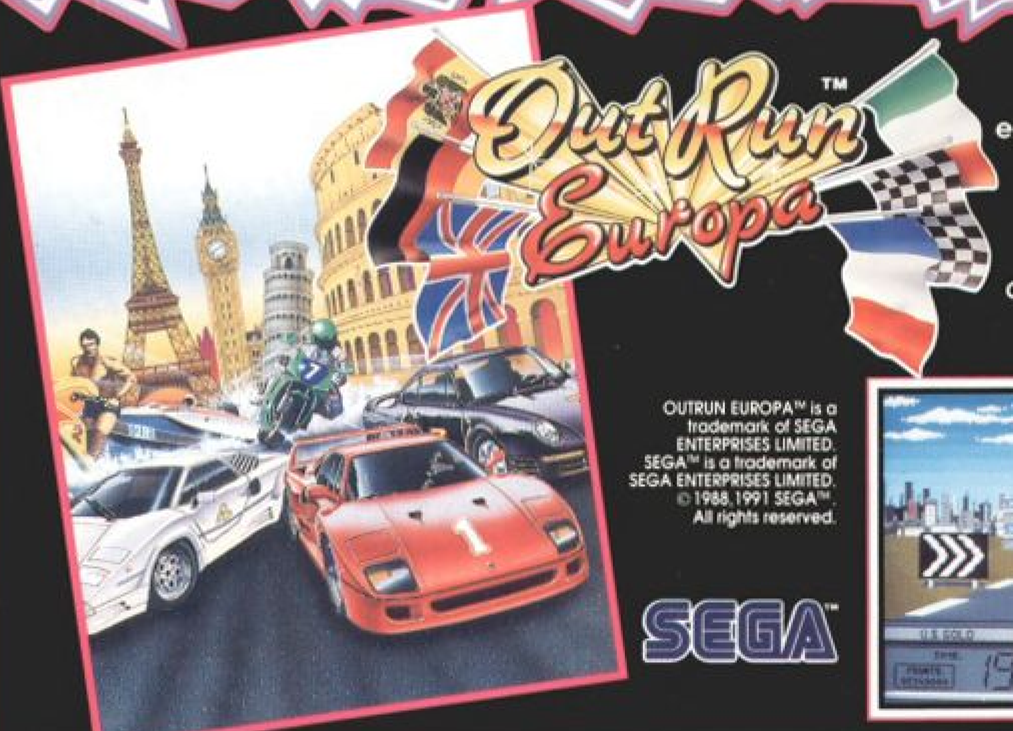

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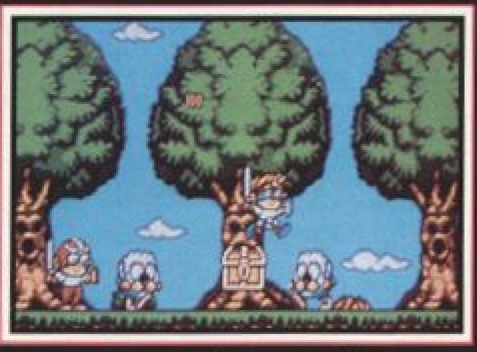

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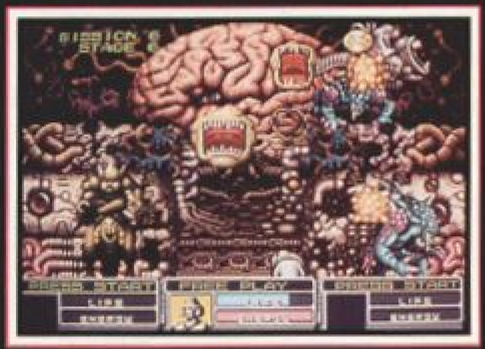

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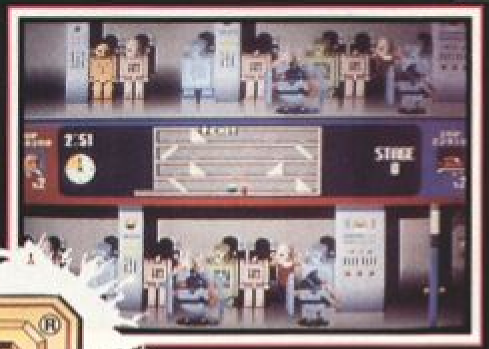

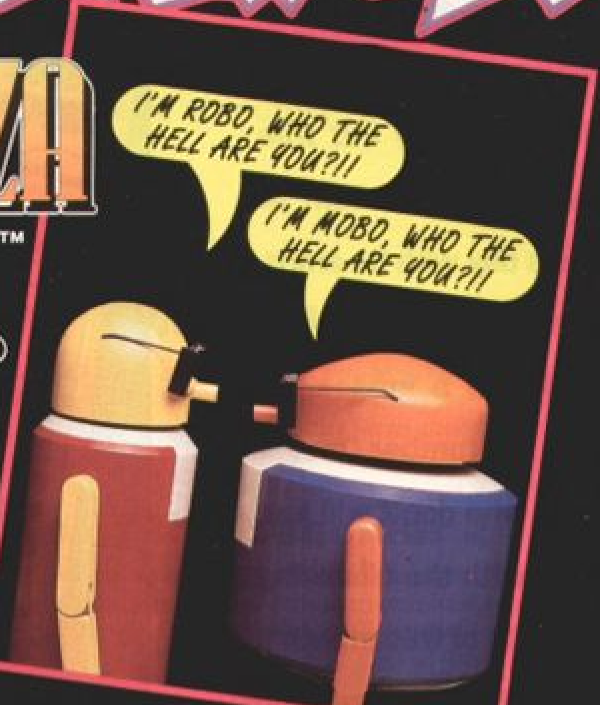
I'M ROBO, WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!!
I'M MOBO, WHO THE HELL ARE YOU?!!

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Screen shots are only intended to be illustrative of the gameplay and not the screen graphics which vary considerably between different formats in quality and appearance and are subject to the computers specification.

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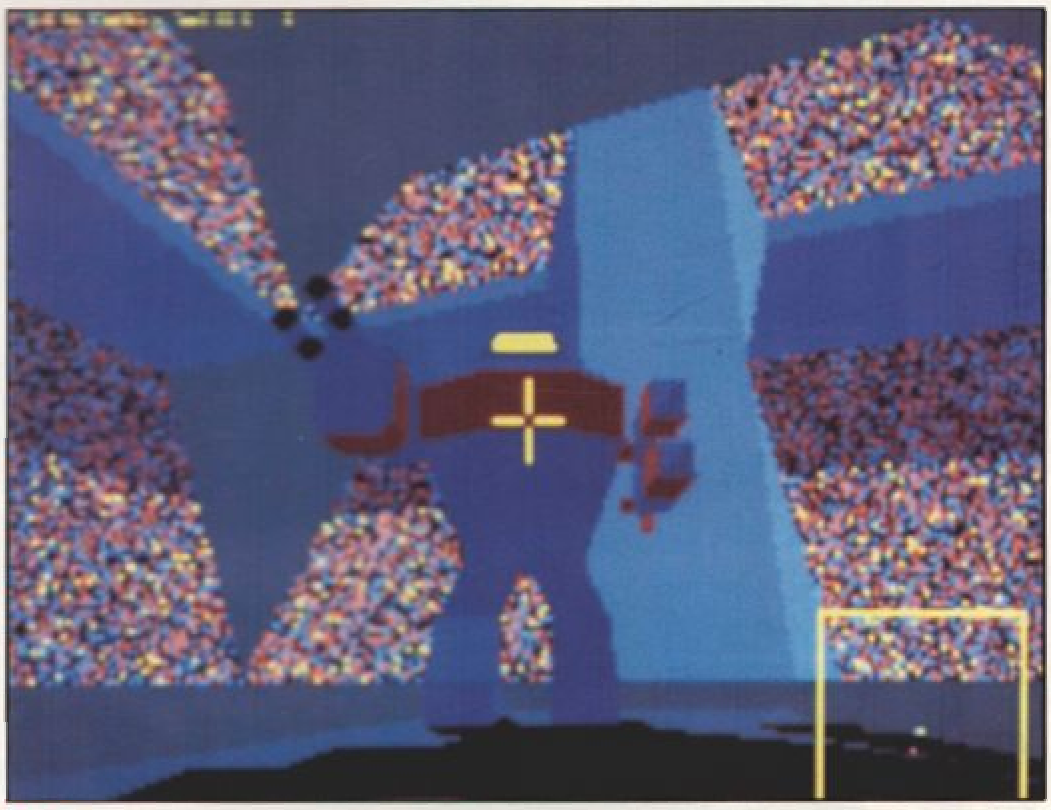
ACE

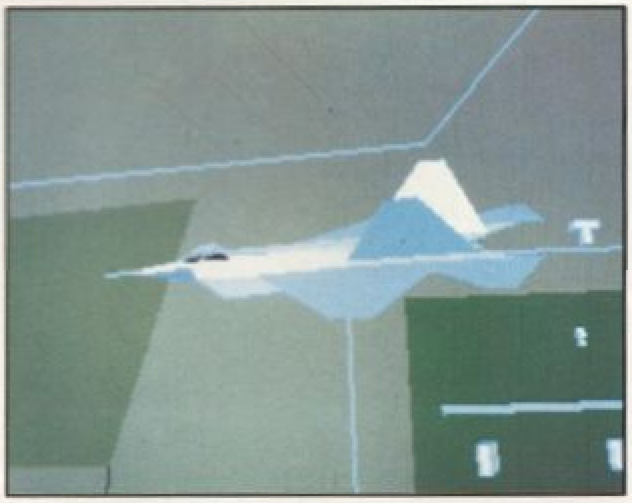
No.52 JAN 1992

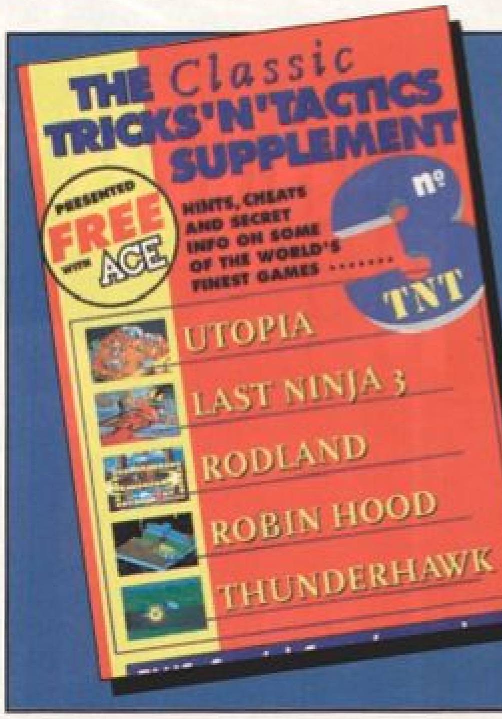
Aaaah. What better way to round off a festive evening than having a nice read of your favourite magazine. In order for you to fully enjoy this edition of ACE magazine, we recommend that you wear a little paper hat (and perhaps have one of those blowey things with a feather on the end in your mouth), loosen any tight garments and relax. We've tried to cater for all Christmas-styled tastes. Those of you who are feeling fine and festive may like to enjoy our free Software Boss game, certain to brighten anyone's day with its amusing - yet accurate - simulation of the race to release a smash hit game and get it to Number One. And those of you who don't will just have to make do with the blistering 6-Page Screentests of this month's best games, the Previews section boasting a host of exclusives and our incredible In the Works pages, sorry.



21 Clanng! Electronic Arts' *Cyberfight* is going to be a *right* laugh, pitting the player against a host of ever-tougher robot opponents in a big futuristic prize-fight. And it's nearly ready.

25 *ATAC* from Microprose combines the usual excellent 3D flight routines with a novel drug-busting twist. Instead of doing battle with countless enemy MIGs, the player must do financial battle with the Columbian drug lords. We talk to developers Argonaut about the problems of blending the two styles and report on work so far.

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TNT
UTOPIA
LAST NINJA 3
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THUNDERHAWK

They say that good things come in threes, and if anything serves as an iron-clad testament to that very fact, it's our latest, third, tips supplement. Twenty (count 'em) four pages of cracking tips extracted at great personal risk from the offices of software publishers around the country. As well as the regular batch of computer tips, our third edition contains a special console round-up. This time, a veritable melting pot of varied game styles are included to keep both rollicking blasters and adventures happy.

Editor Jim Douglas. *Deputy Editor* David Upchurch. *Art Editor* Jim Willis. *Designer* Jenny Abrook. *Staff Writer* Gary Whitta. *Contributor* Lovely Rik Haynes. *Photography* Edward Park. *Advertising Manager* Mike Wills. *Senior Sales Executive* Tina Zanelli. *Advertising Production* Esther Rodd, Remzi Salih. *Publisher* Garry Williams. *Subscriptions* PO Box 500, Leicester LE99 0AA. Tel: 0733 898100. *Colour Origination* Pro Print Repro, Barking Road, E13. *Typesetting* Pre-Press Ltd. *Distribution* EMAP Frontline, Park House, 117 Park Road, Peterborough, PE1 2TR. *Printing* Severn Valley Press, Caerphilly. © EMAP Images 1991 No part of this publication may be reproduced in any form without permission from the publishers. *This month's cover illustration was produced by Kevin Bulmer.*

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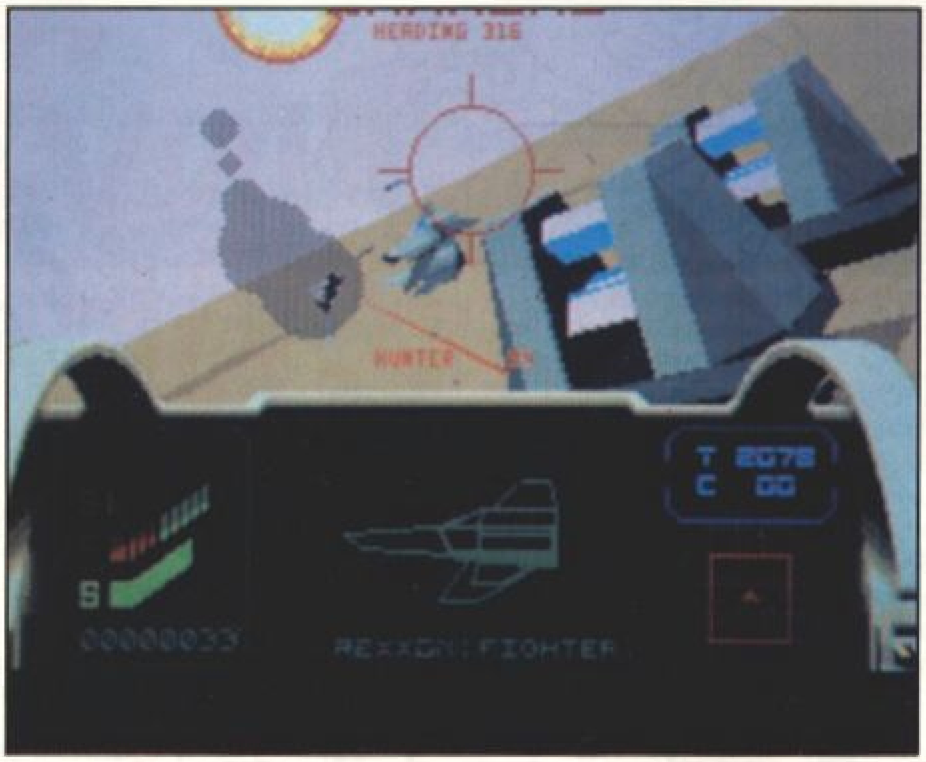
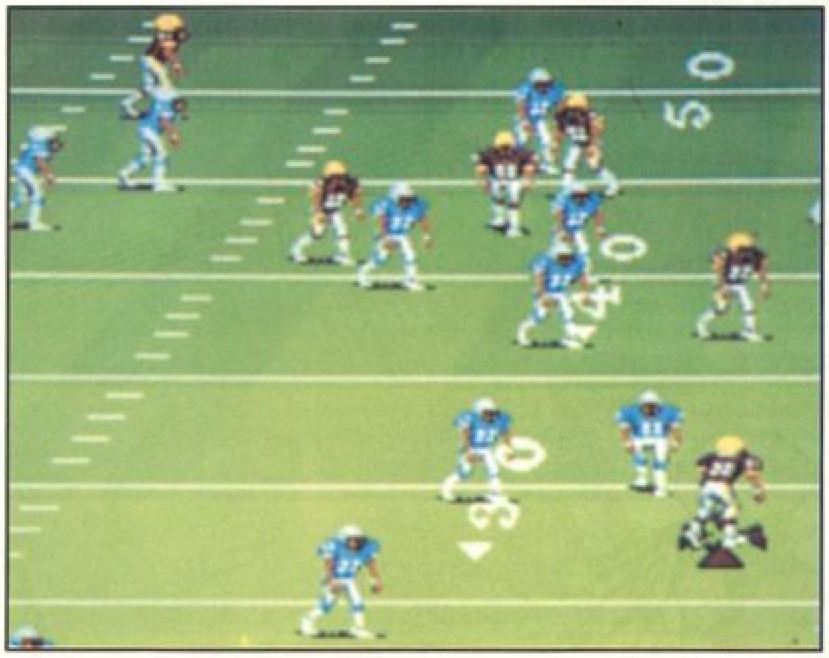
31 Strangeways are people who understand the need of today's gamer. Their *Apocalypse* features lots of violent death. Hooray!

43 A festive collection of Christmas previews, five of which you won't have seen anywhere else. Ho ho ho.





56 Epic from Ocean. Super space wars on a grand scale.

80 The First Samurai from Image Works. Muscle-bound hero in time travelling log-search scenario. (?)

7 Games News - Zelda 3, Utopia 2, B-17 and Spiderman. **10** Tech News - Falcon in Virtual Reality, *2* **15** Letters. **21** In the Works - *Cyber Fight* fromElectronic Arts, *ATAC* fromMicroprose and *Apocalypse* from Image Works. **37** Software Boss! **43** Previews. **87** Console Section - Newest releases for your entertainment system. **96** Next Month. **99** The AwesomeReviews Directory is back!

REVIEWS

The Best Reviews On The Planet!

50

Another World

They may eat little animals out of shells and wear stripey jumpers, but the French can certainly come up with novel game ideas. Delphine's latest release is a case in point; an adventure drawn in polygons!

56

Epic

An age in the making, Digital Image Design's Epic has turned out to be every bit as enormous and clever as their proud claims suggested. But how does it hang together as a game, eh?

62

Populous II

The Best Game In The Entire World Ever. Tidal waves, volcanoes, earthquakes, plagues, battles and a touch of Greek mythology. Bullfrog do send everybody else back to the drawing board.

68

Wolfchild

He's a wolf! He's a man! He's the latest hero from Core Design. Receiving their second 6-Page Screentest in as many months, Core depart from last month's viking adventuring for an all-action romp.

74

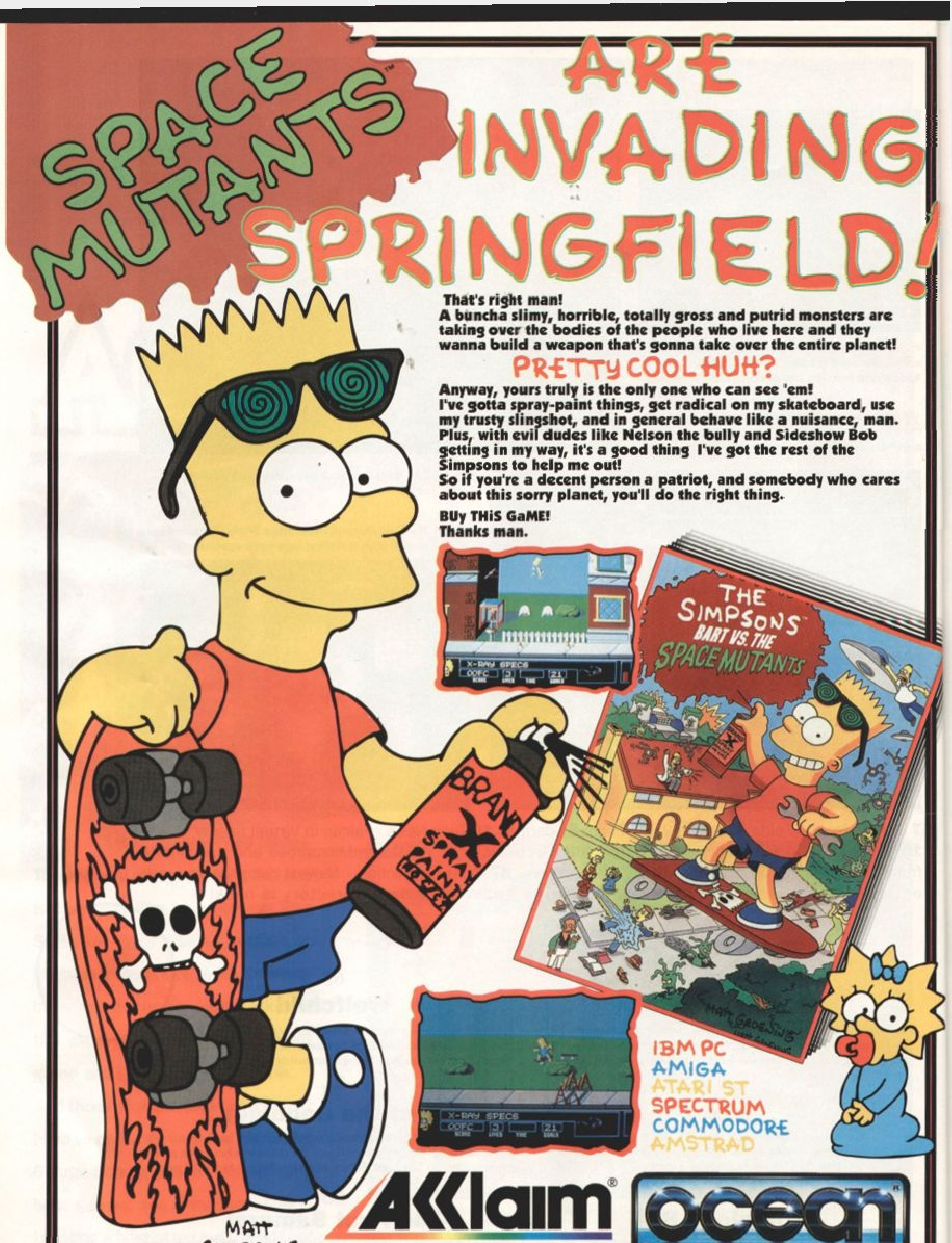
Eye of the Beholder 2

The game which set the adventuring world alight now has a sequel. It's bigger and better than the original, and the characters have even more stupid names. So pack your leather armour (4 hit pts) and away we go!

80

The First Samurai

Pursuing his master's murderer, the First Samurai must battle his way through 24th Century Japan in one of the best arcade adventures for months. From the team that brought you Time Machine.



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Anyway, yours truly is the only one who can see 'em!
I've gotta spray-paint things, get radical on my skateboard, use my trusty slingshot, and in general behave like a nuisance, man.
Plus, with evil dudes like Nelson the bully and Sideshow Bob getting in my way, it's a good thing I've got the rest of the Simpsons to help me out!
So if you're a decent person a patriot, and somebody who cares about this sorry planet, you'll do the right thing.

BUy THiS GaME!
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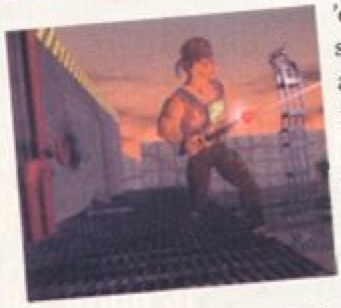


Console companies like Sega and Nintendo have recently got into the habit of producing rather off-beat adverts for television. However, our Yankee cousins are masters of the absolutely amazing or totally tacky advertisement. It's difficult to ignore them sometimes.

Operation C is one of the many eye-catching computer animated 'shorts' produced by Lamb & Company for Japanese software house Konami. Designer Mark Mariutto won praise from his peers for this particular feature.

Enhancing the Rambo character seen in the original Gameboy shoot-'em-up (reviewed in ACE 42), our aggressive hero reeks havoc in some sort of futuristic experimental laboratory before rushing outside into an arid alien battlefield. This gung-ho commando is a 3D articulated model with full facial features and moving joints. Notice the texture-mapped LCD screen from the Gameboy playing the actual game on his chest!

Founded in 1980, Minneapolis-based Lamb & Company is a commercial production house specialising in 3D computer animation and simulation for television advertising, forensic reconstruction and architecture. It used Silicon Graphics workstations running Wavefront and other proprietary software to create the thirty-second spots for the Gameboy versions of Operation C and Teenage Mutant Ninja Turtles 'Fall of the Foot Clan'.

Does Whatever A Spider Can...

One of the most-loved Marvel comic characters celebrated his thirtieth birthday this year. Spiderman is therefore very big business at the moment.

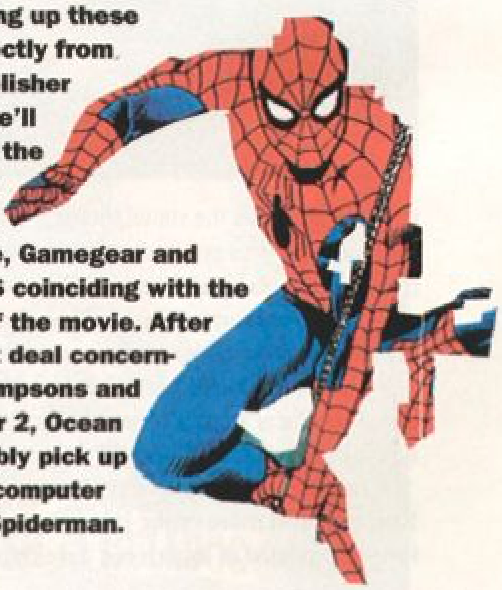
Firstly, Sega has introduced a lively new coin-op sporting the hyperadvanced System 32 hardware. Up to four players can simultaneously play Spiderman, Sub-Mariner, Black Cat or Hawkeye. Using their unique superhuman abilities, these four heroes pursue their arch-rival Dr Doom through the sprawling metropolis. It looks very much like a comic and comes complete with speech bubbles and digitised voices. A Megadrive conversion seems very likely.

More importantly, Sony's Columbia Pictures has decided to turn Spiderman into a big box office attraction in 1993, with the idea of making our superhero a bigger blockbusting movie star than the Terminator. Who will they get to play the agile web-spinning crime-fighter? Michael Biehn, co-star of Aliens and the original Terminator, is tipped to be the lucky guy. And muscleman Arnold Schwarzenegger could play one of the villains or guest as Superman!

ACE previously heard that the director's initials were 'JC', but who could this mysterious person possibly be? What about John Carpenter, mastermind behind Escape from New York and The Thing in the early eighties? John Craven, ex-presenter of Newsround on BBC1, was our absolute outside bet along with Jesus Christ.

Stan Lee, creator of Spiderman, cleared up any confusion when he revealed on Motormouth that the lucky guy was to be Terminator 2 director James Cameron. Thus, Spiderman - The Movie will almost certainly ooze over with fast-paced action and spectacular special effects.

Interestingly, it won't be Sony Imagesoft who produces the video game adaptions of the movie. Acclaim has been rather sneaky by snapping up these rights directly from comic publisher Marvel. We'll be seeing the results on Gameboy, Megadrive, Gamegear and Super NES coinciding with the premier of the movie. After the recent deal concerning the Simpsons and Terminator 2, Ocean will probably pick up the home computer rights to Spiderman.



Step Back In Time

With the Cold War over and no updated stealth aircraft on the near horizon, Microprose has been forced to visit bygone days for inspiration for its next epic flight simulation.

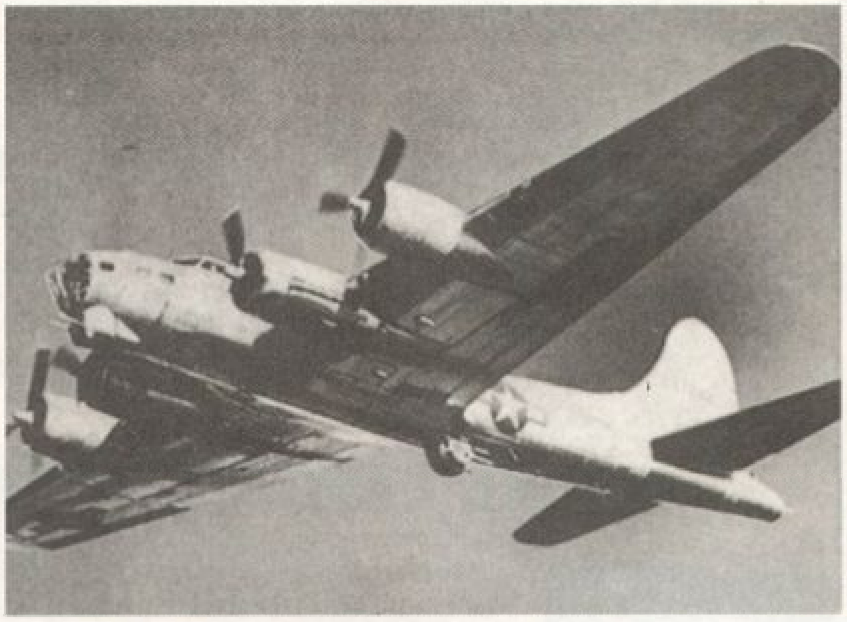
B17 Flying Fortress will recreate the devastating daylight raids on Nazi-occupied Europe by American aircrews based in England during World War Two. Players take command of a bomber, flown in a group formation with other planes, through 25 hazardous combat missions.

Boeing's B-17 was one of the most successful bombers of the entire war. Despite some excellent armour and armament, the so-called 'Flying Fortress' suffered heavy losses over Germany until the arrival of the P-51 Mustang long-range escort fighter in 1943. David Putnam's masterly movie Memphis Bell relives the nightmare of flying one of these B-17 babies on such suicidal daytrips.

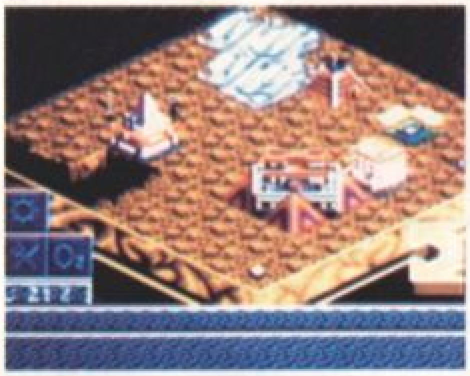
Vektor Grafix, the development outfit responsible for Bomber (Activision) and Space Shuttle (Virgin Games), is busy producing versions of the game on Amiga, PC and ST for a spring 1992 launch. Microprose is promising this release will be another 'stunning 3D simulation' from the firm.

ACE will hopefully be taking B17 Flying Fortress out for a preflight check-up sometime soon.

Meanwhile, Microprose in the States is adapting the award-winning F-19 Stealth Fighter and Railroad Tycoon onto Super NES format. It will be interesting to see how these two best-selling simulation programs are going to be transformed into the kind of slightly less-demanding video games which sell in their millions on the popular Nintendo consoles. Can the average eight year-old gamester really wrap their heads



TWO SEXY?



It comes as little surprise that Gremlin is already producing a sequel to the chart-topping Utopia space-colony simulation game. Currently going under the clever working title of Utopia 2, this is already promising to be even better than its popular predecessor.

Graeme Ing is back in the programming chair but the original's co-designer, Robert Crack, has decided a return to his university studies is the best move for him. Ing has pledged to hire a new graphic designer and presently favours a look similar to the classic sci-fi movie Alien by Ridley Scott. Nothing has hit the drawing-board or paint package yet.So, apart from the visual theme, what's new? Much of the game will remain the same, players still strive for the perfect place to live, but there are lots of refinements planned. These could include a feel more like that of a wargame and Ing also assumes there will be far less hassle when handling rather boring stuff like the tables of figures on the finance screen.

Obviously, the project is still at an early stage and literally anything could happen. Hard facts are scarce, except for the expected release date. Utopia 2 should be available on Amiga and ST within the next twelve months.

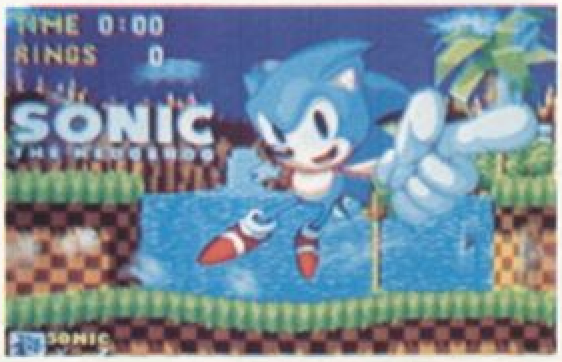
In the meantime, the first Utopia will be converted over to the PC, Super Famicom and more exotic Japanese computer formats. Rest assured, ACE will keep you posted of any major developments.

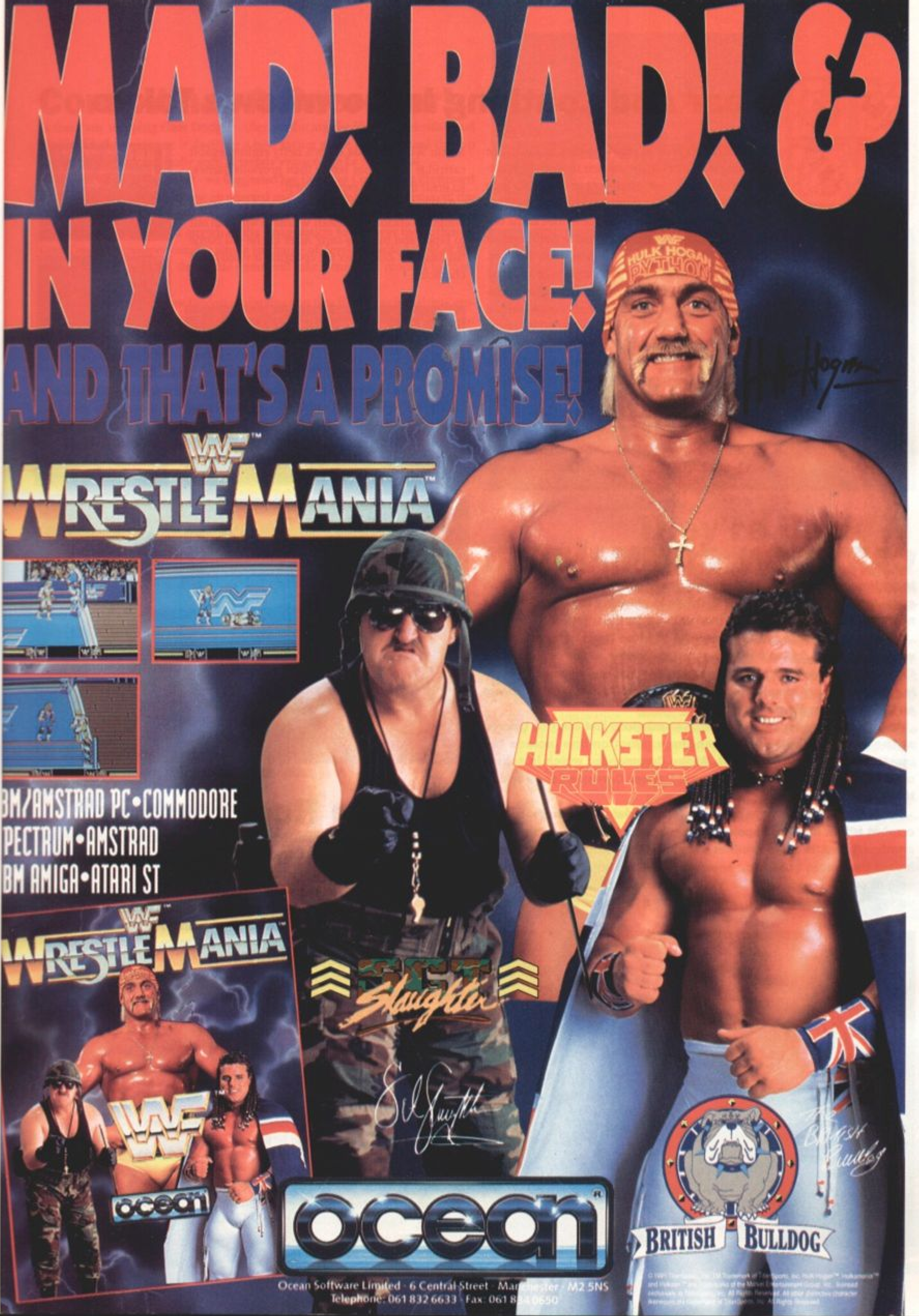
Sale Of The Century

If you're thinking about buying a Megadrive, there's never been a better time to go for it. Sega has finally decided to bundle the phenomenally successful Sonic the Hedgehog with the console for a stonking £129 at most stockists.

Easily the most-talked about cart released so far on the Megadrive, Sonic the Hedgehog is Sega's answer to the multimillion best-seller Super Mario Bros series from Nintendo, both in terms of gameplay and cuteness. Sales of this value-for-money package should soar through the retailers roof. There could even be a shortage of stock this Christmas, so act fast if you're interested.

That's not all. Gamegear owners will soon be able to sample the fun when Sonic the Hedgehog is converted over to their handheld games system in a couple of months. Frogger and Super Kick Off are also on their way.

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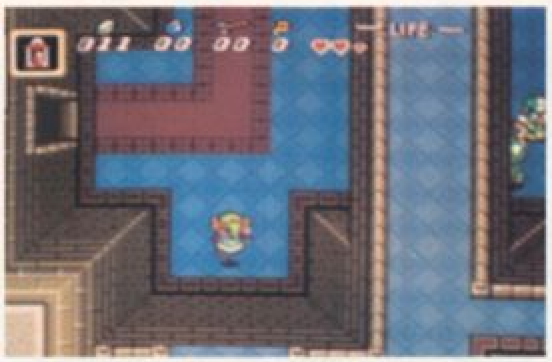
Fear And Loathing In Downtown Tokyo

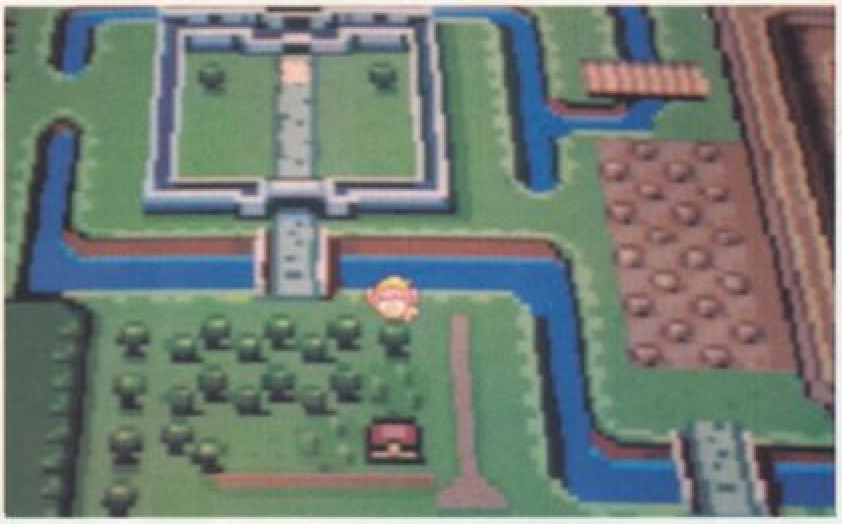
As this report goes to press, players in Japan are queuing at software stores in their thousands, eagerly awaiting the third instalment of the Zelda saga of fantasy role-playing games from Nintendo. This strange activity is probably best described as the oriental equivalent of camping outside Selfridges or Harrods before their famous sales every January.

It's not unknown for Japanese people to be 'mugged' for these new games and, on one outrageous occasion, somebody actually had their house burned down by a disgruntled teenage punter when stocks of Dragon Quest ran out in his town on the first day of release. Apparently, the arsonist's friend was asked to hand his copy over or face the consequences! The passionate players in the land of the rising sun certainly take their video games seriously.

The Legend of Zelda III costs the equivalent of £35 and is only available on the Super Famicom. It has been crafted by the same design team responsible for the highly-respected and much-loved Super Mario World. Zelda III is a hefty eight-megabit cartridge four times larger than previous games, so great things are expected of it.

Perhaps zany American actor, and renowned Nintendo aficionado, Robin Williams will rush out to Japan and buy this cart? After all, he did name his daughter Zelda after the eponymous video game character.





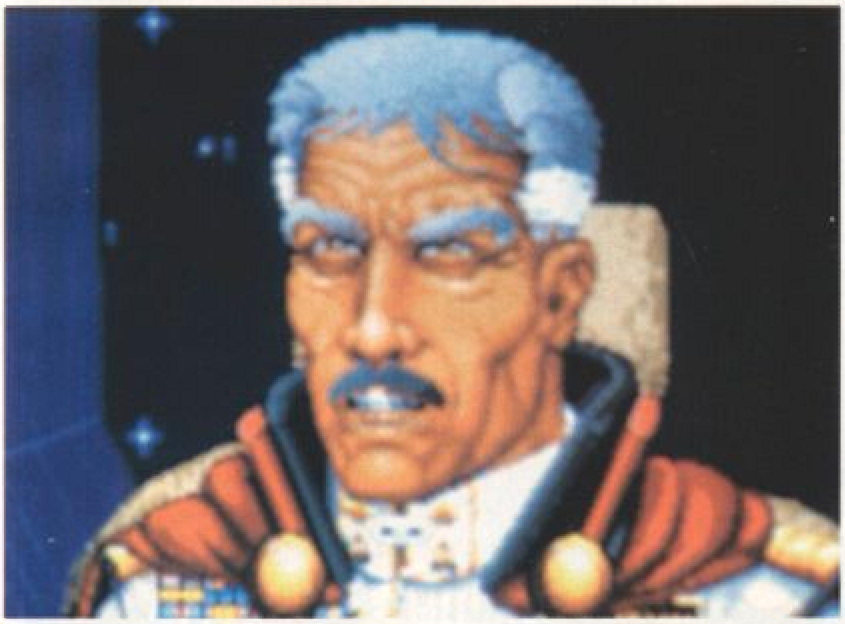
CARRY ON, COMMANDER!

In an impressive effort to squeeze every possible pixel out of the spacetastic Wing Commander II, Origin is planning to sell additional missions for the game on another expansion datadisk.

Special Operations is the brainchild of Ellen Guon, who originally worked at Sierra Online but served as lead writer on the second Wing Commander project. Besides new missions and enemy aces to tackle, this accessory also introduces a prototype Terran fighter known as the Crossbow Bomber.

Origin's Commander series of action simulations just can't be ignored at the moment. Further titles on the production line include the inevitable Wing Commander 3, Strike Commander which is scheduled to appear early next year, and Panzer Commander (working title).

The latter Chris Roberts creation is, surprisingly enough, a tank combat affair. An Origin spokesperson boasts Panzer Commander is another 'breakthrough' product with incredible graphics which look better than most animation seen on TV. No meaty details are available at present, although it's pretty safe to say this game will be set during the Second World War and feature a few armoured vehicles...



Are you Redi for this?

Normally known for professional, expensive and excruciatingly dull flight simulators, Rediffusion has announced a newly improved version of the Venturer 14-seat entertainment sim cum cinema attraction.

You've probably seen the Super-X at computer shows and other similar events. Basically, it couples flight simulator motion techniques with a laserdisc film of something thrilling like skiing down a breathtaking slope, driving a Formula One car at top speed or taking a journey out into space.

The whole set-up is quite believable and very exciting because the chair you sit in moves in time with the action. There's also a loud-speaker system to drown out the screams of petrified grannies and young boys!

Venturer will be shortly complemented by a special two-seat interactive simulator called the Commander. Keep an eye out for our report in the near future.

And Here's One I Prepared Earlier...

The bigger, badder sequel may be out now but don't chuck your copy of Populous in the bin just yet - Electronic Arts has breathed yet more life into Bullfrog's classic original with an editor program to be released in the new year. Programmed by a German Populous addict, it allows players to create their own Promised Lands by altering sprites, backdrops and game variables! It's out in January for £9.99, but unfortunately only Amiga owners need apply.

Core, What A Scorcher!

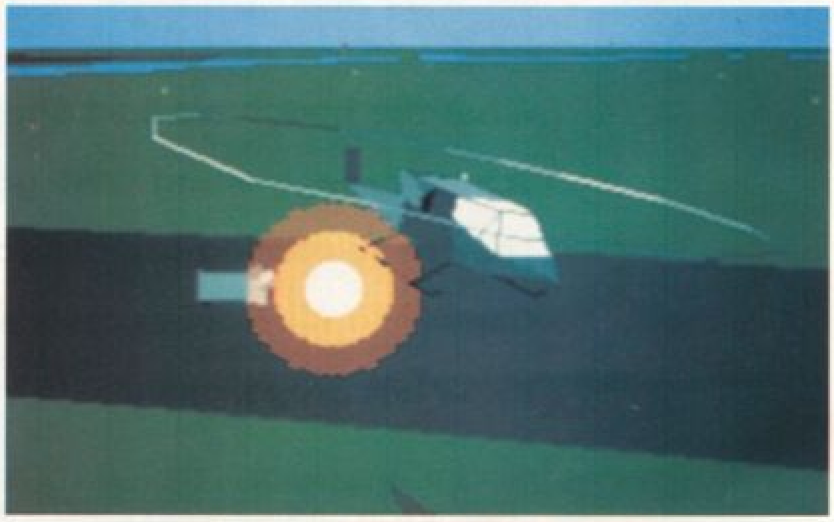
Is there any stopping Core Design? After producing the likes of Heimdall and Wolfchild, the company is devising a new racing game based around the top Jaguar racing cars normally seen at trendy venues like Le Mans et al.

With no working title as yet - we suggested Jag Drag but Core wasn't impressed - the game will supposedly use an adapted and slightly enhanced version of the fast and fantastic 3D graphics routines first seen in Thunderhawk. It therefore shouldn't take too great a stretch of the imagination to discover the author of Core Design's chopper combat sim is in charge of development. As lots of the code is already in place, the whole game will take a mere six months to complete.

A spokesperson for Core Design maintains that this first foray into drive-'em-ups will be totally innovative, knock everybody for six and make Indy 500 from EA look decidedly pale in comparison. Bold claims true, but believable ones considering the pedigree of products before it.

'Project J' is due for release on Amiga, PC and ST by May 1992. There could also be a Megadrive version of Thunderhawk out on the streets sometime later next year. No console publisher has signed it up yet - Core Design only goes for floppy disk formats at present and has only just included the good old C64 to that list - but the smart money would be on Virgin Games. Richard Branson's softcos has already converted Chuck Rock and Corporation over to the Megadrive.

Chuck Rock 2, entitled 'Son of Chuck', is also on the way from the same design team at Core Design. Phew!



ALL TOGETHER NOW

Californian creators of Falcon, Spectrum Holobyte, and Leicester-based W Industries, makers of the Virtuality arcade video game system, have entered into the 'historic marketing venture' to form Cyberstudio, a virtual reality software publishing concern exclusively devoted to coin-op titles.

"Virtuality represents a quantum leap in entertainment technology and should be considered the recreation vehicle of the nineties and beyond," justifies Spectrum Holobyte founder Gilman Louie, "With this system, any world or fantasy can be created to totally immerse the user in an extraordinary sensual experience."

Initially, Cyberstudio will modify and enhance existing Virtuality games but plans are underway to develop several original titles, the first of which will be ready by early 1993.

It's a fair bet that the first game will probably be a flight simulation, perhaps even based around the F-16 Falcon, which would also utilise the Electronic Battlefield pioneered by Spectrum Holobyte. The PC version of Falcon 3.0 is the first game to demonstrate the Electronic Battlefield and this will be followed by Avenger A-10 next year. This innovative concept lets many players compete on the same battlefield. One person, for instance, could command a tank while three other players pilot a squadron of fighter aircraft. Such multiplayer capabilities should suit the Virtuality equipment very well.

They're Back

Namco has tried to breath new life into the classic shoot-'em-up Galaxions by introducing a sit-down arcade video game system with fancy 3D graphics and a dinky little laser gun.

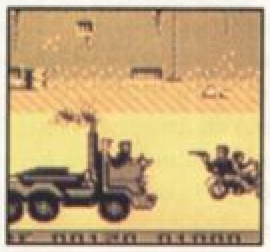
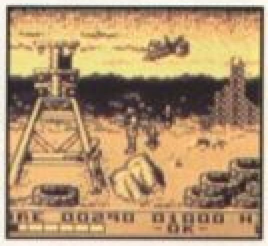
Starblade is a bit too linear and non-interactive for many players tastes, but does incorporate some particularly good sprites and backdrops. The thrills and spills don't stop there, either. Namco thoughtfully provides an 'active seat' which vibrates when the enemy hits you and a four-channel surround sound system to produce "echoes through the players body".

Perhaps there will be more attention to gripping gameplay in the next 'hyperentertainment machine'?

STARBLADE
01
WARNING
01

HIGH PRAISE DRIFTERS

What the heck have Bart Simpson, Arnold Schwarzenegger and WWF got in common? They're all coming soon to your Nintendo Gameboy! Rik Haynes casts an eye over these hot properties...

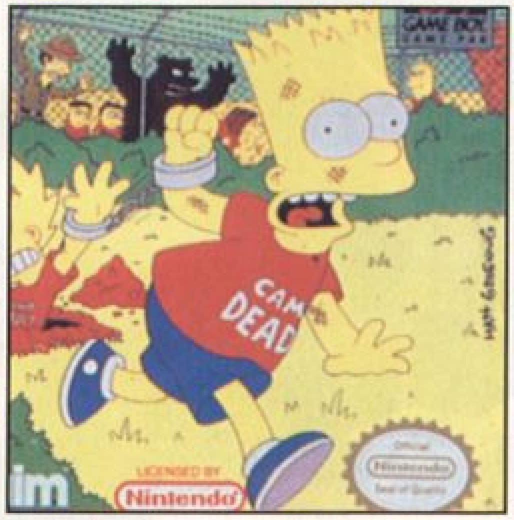



Nobody had even heard of Acclaim a couple of years ago. Today, thanks to a string of best-selling NES cartridges, this prolific New York company is one of the biggest video game publishers in the world. These guys certainly know how to make the right connections. Earlier this year, Acclaim was one of the first firms allowed to manufacture its own NES carts. Previously, such software was strictly made by Nintendo itself in Japan. More recently, the Super NES has been added to the hit-list with titles like The Simpsons, Smash TV and Super WWF Wrestlemania on their way.

At the beginning of this month, Acclaim announced plans to convert its most popular games onto the Sega Megadrive and Gamegear, thus completing the line-up of total coverage. Enough of this corporate backgrounder, I hear you cry, what about those exciting new Gameboy offerings?

BART SIMPSON'S ESCAPE FROM CAMP DEADLY

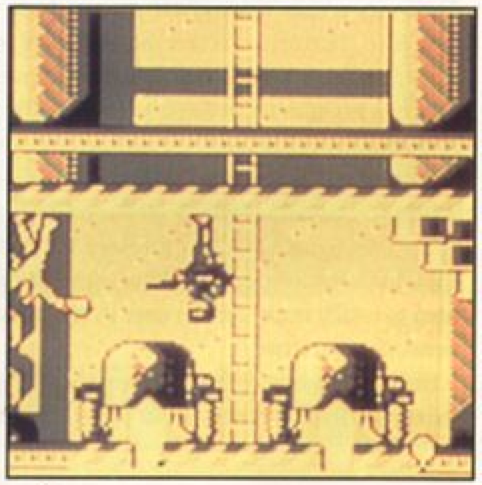
There's just no escape from this goofy American family of total misfits. If you're not completely fed up watching them on satellite TV or video, Acclaim is ready willing and able to supply the Simpsons in software form. In this humour-packed Gameboy adventure, rebellious Bart and his smart sax-playing sister Lisa are sent to summer camp, the place where American parents banish their brats for eight weeks every year.



Trouble is, this dangerous dump is lorded over by bullies and cruel camp counsellors who excel in dishing out tortuous tasks. You must guide the Simpson sprogs through the sadistic obstacle course, surviving quicksand, piranha pits, greedy gators and Nelson's gang of motorcross thugs. Escape from Camp Deadly will be available later this month for about £25 and Acclaim is already preparing a sequel for release next year.

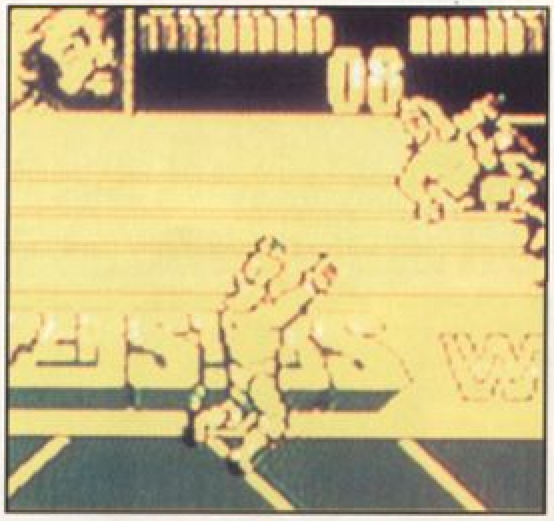
TERMINATOR 2: FUTURE WARS

The Simpsons and Terminator 2 must be the biggest things to happen in the entertainment industry this year. No wonder Acclaim has licensed both of 'em. Stealing scenes from the brilliant Schwarzenegger movie, players are led through a series of arcade sequences featuring futuristic hunter killers, fast motorbike chases and furious gunfights. If you actually take a close look at the Terminator 2 film credits when it's released on video in early 1992, you'll notice a plug saying 'play the hit Nintendo games from Acclaim'. See what I mean about those handy contacts...

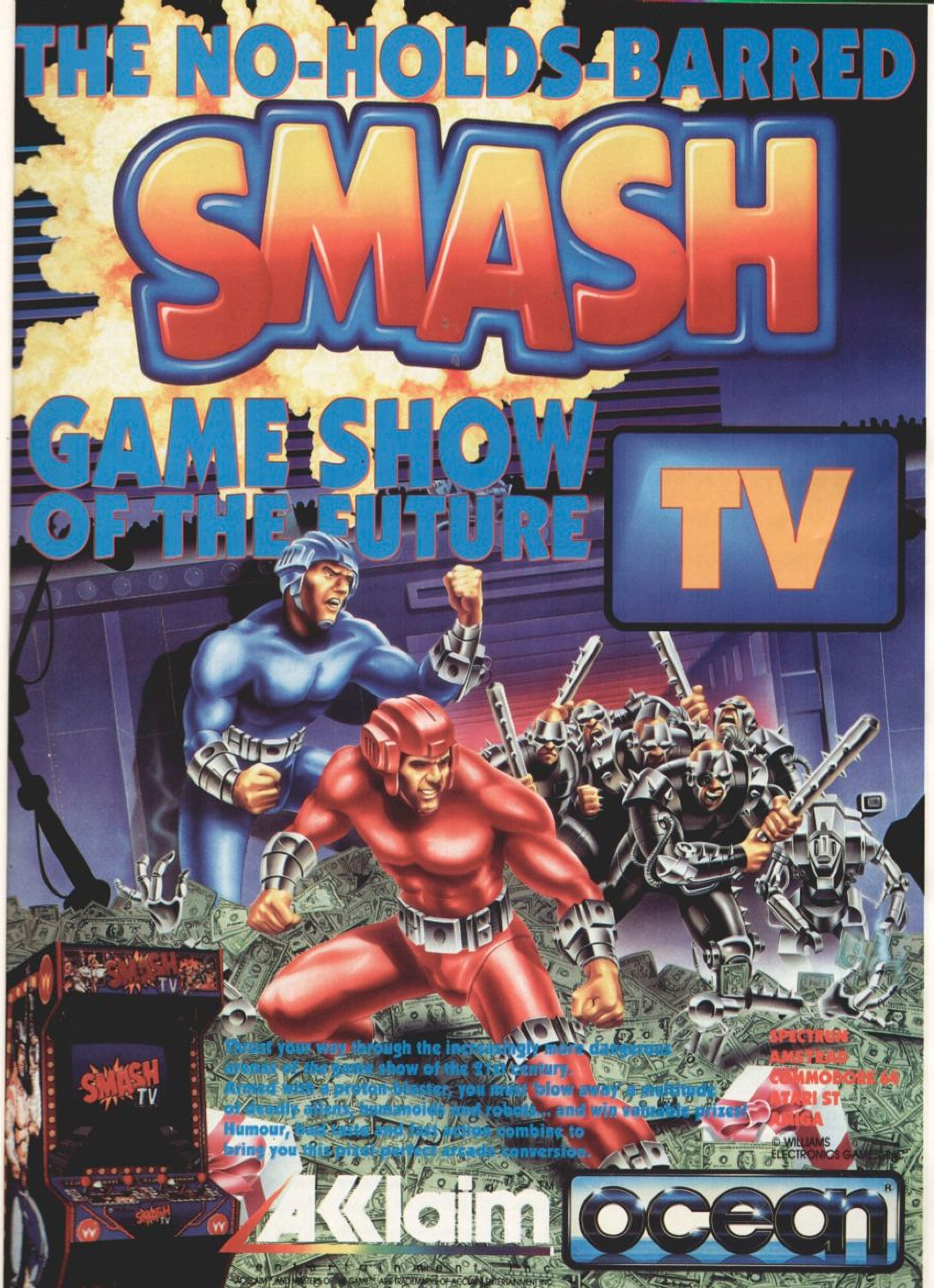


WWF SUPERSTARS

Taking advantage of another cult programme from BSkyB, Acclaim has converted the beefcake World Wrestling Federation appeal of Hulk Hogan, Ultimate Warrior and Randy 'Macho King' Savage into this blistering bout of head-butts, dropkicks and clotheslines. WWF Superstars also includes action out of the ring, two-player head-to-head GameLink option and simulated TV interviews with each wrestler conducted before and after every match. A very handy Christmas present for Hulkmaniacs, eh?



WWF
SUPERSTARS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SPECTRUM
AMSTRAD
COMMODORE 64
ATARI ST
AMIGA

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Letters

Hard to believe though it is, we're not always infallible, and from time to time things occasionally go awry here at ACE Towers. This month the gremlins decided to hit our Letters section, and all the titles for the letters unfortunately got lost in some computer maze. Due to this happening at an unfortunately late time in our schedule, we didn't have time to come up with a completely new set of titles, so we had to borrow some from the problems page of our sister magazine Just Seventeen instead. Hope you don't mind...

I FINISH TOO EARLY

Dear ACE, I have never before felt so strongly as to put pen to paper as I do now. I am absolutely livid about some games and the time taken to complete them. One magazine stated about Robin Hood, "there are a good 30 or so hours of gameplay here." Bullshit. After two hours I had completed the damn thing! Apparently it was "fun" to walk around talking, exploring etc, but it wasn't. This magazine had wasted around £25 of my money. I was also hogged off by Megatraveller (2 days), Bard's Tale (a week) and Hillsfar (five hours). Midwinter took me about ten hours. However, one game has delighted me, Eye of the Beholder. This is a real joy to play. It's also a real challenge. Make no mistake I am an experienced gamesplayer, especially strategy and adventure games, but this is no excuse for the ease of a game.

Great idea about six page reviews, from these we can see what a game is really like. Based on these, the game I'll purchase will be Floor 13. Why not have a section specially for adventures and RPGs, where quality games are printed and help can be given to inexperienced (and experienced) adventurers?

Matthew Gorman
Portsmouth
Hampshire

We're not too sure about your claims about games being too easy. Most of the time designers seem to get the difficulty just right, and if anything they seem to be veering more towards the tough side. However, it's an interesting point, but you should never actually think "God, this game is really hard!" By that time, you're well on the road to frustration and disappointment. Instead, your argument seems to suggest that you would like games to be simply bigger. So what's the verdict? Do ACE readers reckon that today's software is easy, hard, or just lovely and right.

I'VE GOT A NASTY COMPLAINT

Dear ACE, well done with the new style man. It's great, but like Mr Trevor Booth is issue 51 I would like to see more six page reviews. So please hurry it up. I have only two complaints. One is what happened to the charts in the pink pages? You were only mag I had read that did the charts by the game's average score. Secondly, the thing I find annoying is that when you review a game you don't say if or when the game is out for other computers such as Civilization in issue 51. Is that going to come out for ST or the Amiga? When? If you answered questions like that it would be very useful.

I own an ST and I want to get a game designer kit. What is the best kit around, I have though of a cricket game. What kit would be the best for a game like that?

Nathan Langton
Bristol

We'll be doing more six page reviews very soon, so just hang on, alright? Everything comes to he who waits. Patience is a virtue. As for the ACE stockmarket, that had to be swept into the bin along with everything else to make room for our glistening new reviews directory. You'll be pleased to hear, however, that we have taken heed of your second quibble, and as of this month we'll be giving

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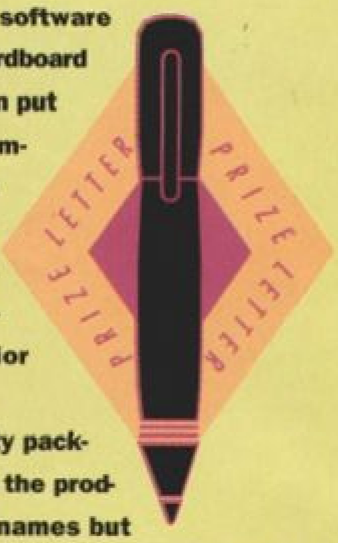
AM I NORMAL?

Dear ACE, what on earth happened to pages 7 and 8 in your December issue? There were five items in your News section that were finished in mid-sentence. I'm sure, not often you receive complaints, but I couldn't finish the magazine afterwards, for I am one of your most loyal readers! Please in future, publish the ends of sentences.

Robert Sharp
Banstead
Surrey

Oops! Frank Spencer strikes again. Okay, okay, we admit. Some of our News stories got caught a bit short. Those responsible have been publicly executed in the car park at the back of our office.

STEPMUM MAKES MY LIFE A MISERY



Dear ACE, I have a very serious complaint which I would like to voice through your pages to the entire industry. Why oh why do software houses continually persist in packing their games in large cardboard boxes to make it look like there is a lot of stuff inside, then put nothing in there but a disk and a stupid little instructions pamphlet. It's just the biggest rip-off going! I can't think of any other medium that uses this cynical marketing ploy. Not only is it totally impractical for us games players who have to find somewhere to keep all these giant boxes, but it is obviously just a way for software houses to make their inferior games look more appealing and worth the asking price.

I'm not quibbling with people like MicroProse, whose hefty packaging is justified by the large manuals and documentation the product requires, but certain software houses (I won't name names but everyone knows who they are) seem to think that they can get away with producing a giant package and then putting, if you'll excuse the term, sod all inside!

If there's any consolation to this sad tale, it's that I don't think this rip-off tactic is going to work. Today's software-buying public are far too shrewd to fall for it. When you pick up a big box and it hardly weighs anything and you can hear the disk rattling around inside, you know immediately what the SP is. But who knows what depths some firms may stoop too - maybe they'll start putting bits of lead inside their boxes to make them seem heavier!

To be honest with you, I wouldn't really mind so much - it's not as if the standard of the game is diminished just because it comes in a big box after all - if it wasn't for two things. One, the problem with shelf space I mentioned earlier, and two, I think that documentation is very important to a game. When you get a glossy manual and lots of other bits, it makes you feel good and adds to the overall game experience. By putting out these stupid little leaflets inside a giant box, that whole concept seems to be demeaned somewhat. That's my opinion anyway.

Before I go, I would like to congratulate you on the excellent new section Gary Whitta's Previews. With all those first-time stories and exclusive screenshots, I now know exactly where to go to best the beast advice on what I'll be playing over the next few months. Keep up the good work!

Roger Allison
Maidstone
Kent

Right on, comrade! We fully agree with your comments about con-job packaging. There's nothing we find more annoying than getting all excited when a giant game box finds its way into the office, then tearing off the cellophane to find nothing more than a disk and a pathetic bit of paper inside. This isn't the only letter we've received on this subject either - it seems more and more readers are getting hot and bothered over the packaging issue. So maybe it's about time you industry bigwigs got your act together, eh?

I AM IN TURMOIL!

Dear ACE, I am writing to you because I value ACE's comments and opinions and would like them on the questions below:

1. CDTV? I know what one is and everything but is this a good thing because people say it's not worth the money but other people say that due to its audio and graphic capabilities it's the worth the asking price. So is it worth getting?

2. The price of software seems to be going up all the time. Is it due to the rise of more and more games getting copied? If so wouldn't CDs be the best way round the problem as you can't copy them and the price could come down a little?

3. Could you please tell me if F117A Stealth Fighter 2 and Wing Commander will be brought out on the Amiga?

I would be very grateful if you would answer my questions and I must also tell you what a great improvement you have made on your mag. It's just the best one money can buy.

GL Mattoioli
Tonbridge
Kent

Right, one at a time, then...

Firstly, it's not really our place to tell you what to do, but you're probably best off waiting a while to see how the CDTV fares before taking the plunge. Though it's been on sale for quite a while now, it hasn't exactly been flying out of the shops. Also, Commodore recently lopped a hundred pounds off the retail price, so who's to say another drop isn't on the cards?

Don't let anyone mislead you about the

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machine's superior graphics either - they're exactly the same as on the Amiga, and only the sound is improved due to the CD drive. A more favourable bet might be to get hold of the bolt-on CD drive for the Amiga when that appears. The point about software on CD is a good one, but don't for a minute think that the price would come down just because of the no-more-piracy factor and cheaper medium. Look at audio CDs - they sell more than conventional LPs and are cheaper to produce, but they still cost twice the price. As long as the public are willing to pay high prices, they're not going to come down. Finally, you'll be pleased to hear that F117A and Wing Commander will both be finding their way onto the Amiga - soon.

FANCIED BY TWO BOYS

Dear ACE, I've been a computer games player for many years, from the good old days of the Jupiter Ace to the awesome Amiga 1500 I own now. I'm also an avid car fan, and on the weekends there's nothing I like more than to bring my two interests together by playing driving games on the Amiga. I follow the race-game genre avidly and as such I have noticed that recently there have been a lot of driving games licensed to a particular car or bike. Lotus, Toyota, Suzuki and Ferrari have all been signed up in the past, and now I hear that there are plans to bring out a Jaguar game.

The reason I am writing in is because there aren't really that many good cars left to licence, so I wondered if any software companies might be interested in doing a game about mine. I own a 1981 Ford Capri 2.8 litre convertible with white-wall tyres, leather bucket seats, electric windows and multiplay CD player with 140 watt stereo output. Obviously it's a pretty excellent motor, and it really goes some too.

I think that this car would be an excellent one to licence. If any software houses would like to sign my car up, I would be more than happy to talk business. I'm sure there's lots of potential, and I would even design the game for them.

David Valliant
Exeter

Well, how about it, you software houses? Dave's car does sound a bit good, and it's got to be a better bet than Team Yugo, hasn't it? If you're interested, give us a call at ACE and we'll put you in touch.

HIS SIZE FRIGHTENS ME

Dear ACE, let me tell you about magazine coverdisks. I buy just about every computer book going each month, and while ACE is undeniably one of the best in terms of editorial quality, it seems that you've been left back in the stone age as far as disks are concerned! CU Amiga, Zero, Amiga Format, Amiga Power, The One, ST User and many others have cover disks which greatly enhance the overall package and VFM factor. So my question to you is: why doesn't ACE drag itself into the 90s and do a coverdisk too?

I'm sure that it is a good idea financially, as these disks must greatly increase sales, particularly if there's something good on the disk, like a playable demo of a new game or even a complete old game. So come on ACE, get your act together and get a disk on the front and make your excellent magazine even better!

Alex Knockholt
Langley
Slough

Though you're correct in a very general sense about cover disks improving a magazine's sales, it's not quite as simple as that. Notice that most of the disk magazines you mentioned are single format - ie they only cover one machine. ACE covers a wide range of machines, both computers and consoles, which makes a coverdisk a bit of an unlikely prospect. Even if we managed to squeeze enough good ST, Amiga and PC stuff onto a tri-format disk to make it worthwhile, we would immediately alienate all our console readers. Indeed, that's why Zero has recently dropped all its console coverage. Would you pay an extra quid for a magazine with a disk that's no good to you? Lastly, a coverdisk doesn't necessarily enhance the overall package - some might go as far as to say that it's just a cynical ploy to make up for the low quality of the magazine itself. Still, we're always open to readers' comments, so why not let us know where you stand on this highly-controversial issue?

HE WANTS TO, BUT I'M NOT READY

Dear ACE, I would like to know why it is that you can't buy computer games in supermarkets. Many other retail chains, like Virgin, HMV, Dixons, Laskys and Rumbelows all sell games for the various computers and consoles, but if you were to go looking for the latest releases in one of these so-called "super"markets like Sainbury's Tescos or Safeways, you would have no luck at all! How can these giant chains purport to sell everything you need if they pay no attention to one of the fastest-growing entertainment mediums in the world today?

Often, when I am doing my weekly shopping at the local Kwik Save, I may want to purchase the new Bitmap Brothers game as well. But can I? Oh no, I have to get on a bus and go all the way up to the computer shop in the precinct. I'm sure if it had been a tin of tomatoes or some meatballs I had been after, I would have had no trouble. But computer games? Pah!

The way I see it, these short-sighted supermarket chains are only shooting themselves in the foot in the long run. With the likes of Sega and Nintendo, it won't be long before everybody will be adding the latest hot cartridges to their weekly shopping lists. So come on you so-called convenience stores - let's see some convenience, eh?

Andrew Chunk
Leeds
Yorkshire

Erm... yes.

Knightmare

"You are setting forth into another place, another time, another world," said Treguard, The Dungeon Master. "And what makes you think that you four mere mortals will succeed in the Quest when so many others have failed?"

I understood, at that moment, that our mission was going to take all our endurance, all our collective skill, and, most of all a depth of courage, that I wasn't sure we possessed.

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'Knightmare' is a sophisticated role-playing adventure where you are challenged to solve complex puzzles, logic problems and riddles that reveal a rich, ever-more rewarding storyline.

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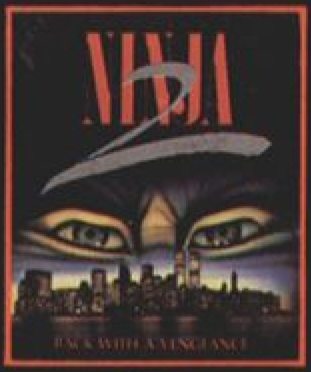
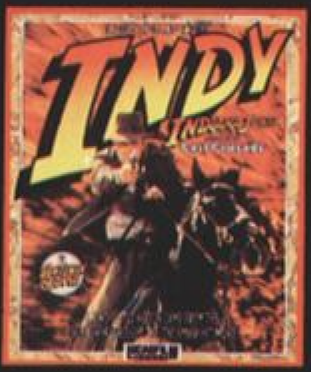
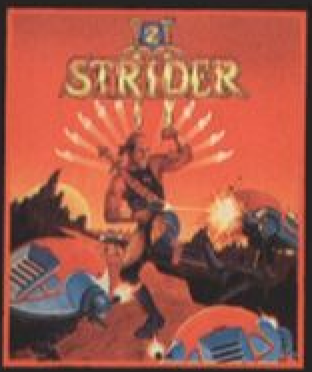
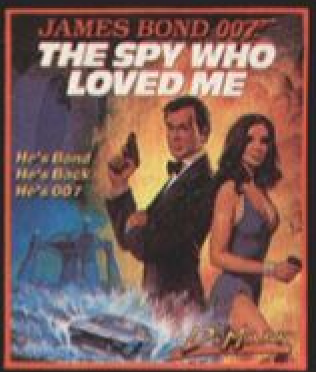
- James Bond stars in a classic action-packed race against time to save the world from the crazed and power mad Karl Stromberg. With one-to-one arcade style shoot-outs, multi-level action and top secret codes to crack, this is the fastest paced and most exciting Bond thriller to date.









DOMARK

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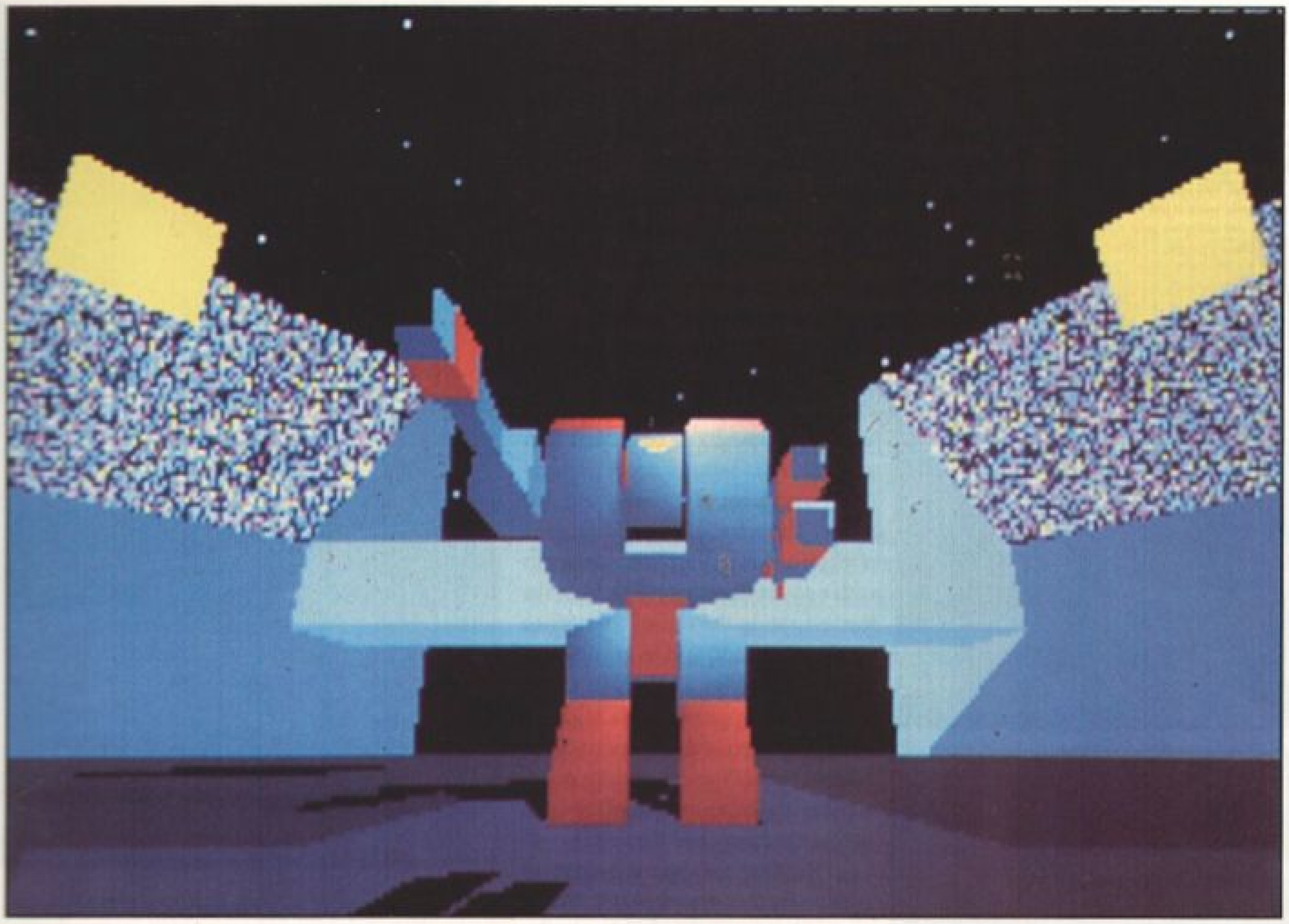


(Left) *One of the most exciting aspects of Cyber Fight promises to be its two-player game, where both players fight against each other on a split-screen display. "The trouble with machine-to-machine link-ups is that I don't think that that many people ever manage to set it up," comments Michael.*

(Below top) That processor-intensive texture mapping in action. Available only to MCGA users due to technical complications [explained in the main text], it's used to animate the arena's video wall (here showing a missile in flight).

(Below bottom) Kaaa-Boooooom! When a robot's taken more damage than it can stand, it explodes in a quite spectacular manner, spraying debris in all directions.

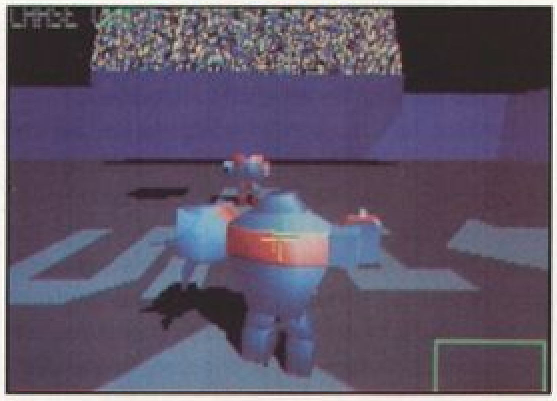
CYBER FIGHT

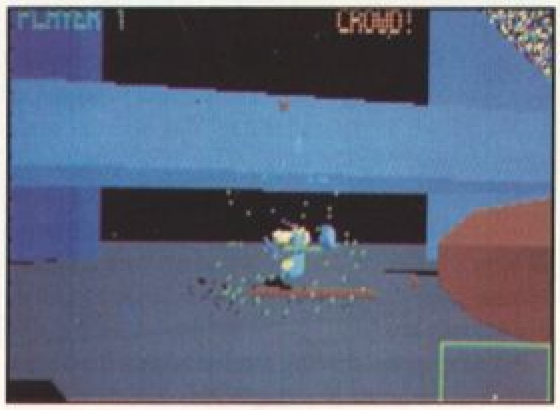
Clank! Crump! It's more violent than Friday night in a Glasgow pub! Electronic Arts' forthcoming Cyber Fight gives you - yes, YOU! - the chance to rip your friends limb from limb!

Two giant robots, tall as houses, stand immobile and impassive at each end of a massive arena lined with stands, each packed to overflowing with thousands of spectators. Yet strangely the stadium is quieter than a graveyard. They are waiting for the battle to begin. Inside the cockpit of each robot sits a pilot, one hand sweatily gripping the control throttle, the other poised over their weapons systems. They too are waiting for the battle to begin.

The shrill blare of a klaxxon echoes around the stadium, followed by a roar from the crowd. Servos whine into service and the robots slowly march towards the other, the floor of the arena reverberating with the weight of each lumbering step. As the two draw together they pause briefly, as if taking stock of each other. Then, with a screech of motors, one raises a giant chainsaw and lunges, the other locks on with a missile and fires. Let battle commence...

The concept of giant human-piloted robots is not a new one. It's been a staple ingredient of Japanese 'manga' comics for over ten years now, originating with the *Gundam* series and continuing today with the highly-popular *Gunhed*. However, British readers may be more familiar with them from the 'cult' (i.e. excellent FX, crap acting) video *Robot Jox*. Whatever, you have to agree that the thought of being able to pilot one of two giant combat droids clanking seven grades of Shell out of each in some futuristic gladiatorial contest is a pretty sexy one.





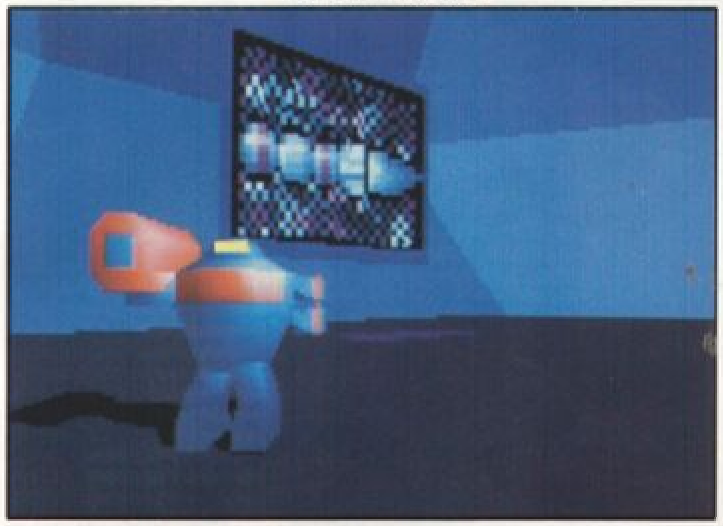
Activision attempted to tap into the concept with their Battletech series, but totally missed the point by treating their games as plan-viewed wargames and depicting the warbots as tiny sprites. Fortunately, Cyber Fight, the latest opus from Michael '*Powerdrome*' Powell, looks to set the record straight for those who fancy a bit of all-out ruckin' robot action.

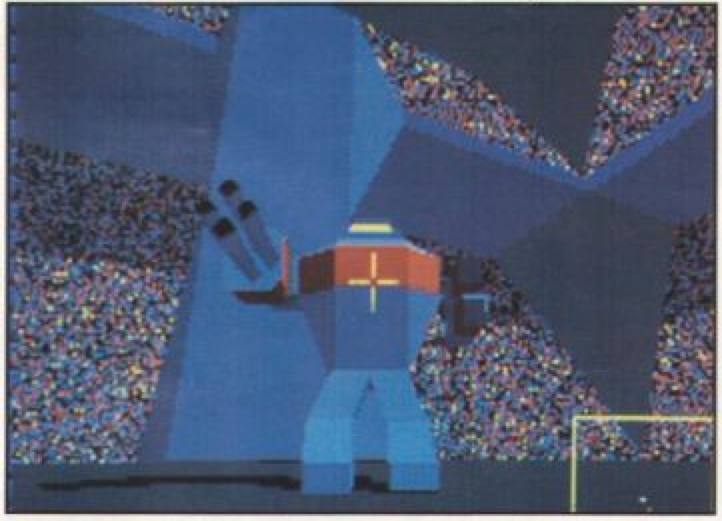
Cyber Fight's plot, which EA are keen to stress is more than likely to change, shares more than a few similarities to the plot of the aforementioned *Robot Jox*. However, instead of *Jox*'s desert-based battleground, Cyber Fight's combat takes place in enclosed hi-tech arenas, with crowds of bloodthirsty spectators baying for blood from the surrounding grandstands.

The aim of each round is literally to smash your opponent's droid to pieces. It's not a game for the faint-hearted - anyone whose idea of a good time is a quiet night in with a take-away Chinese and a video of *Pretty Woman* had best stay away. The champion can then use his cash winnings to buy weapon upgrades and assorted enhancements. The ultimate aim is to work your way up the league to become overall champion.

22▶

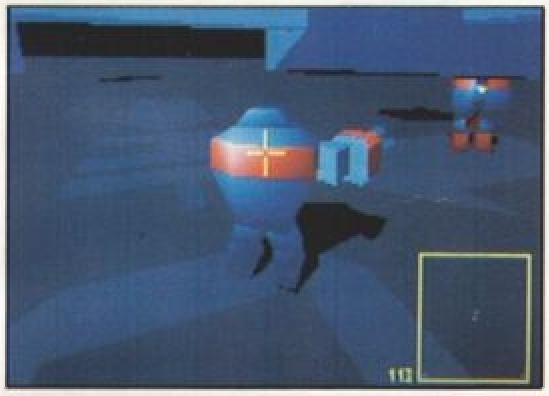
(Below)
The robots are all fully animated, albeit in a slightly stylised way. "All the robot's motions are slightly exaggerated for effect," explains Michael. "If a robot falls off a platform, when it hits the ground it's body will compress then expand, like a cartoon character's does."





(Above)
Some of the camera angles make the robots look very threatening. I wouldn't like to meet this guy down a dark street, would you?

(Below)
Like a top flight sim, Cyber Fight boasts a whole slew of out-of-droid views, including views from the stands, views from a chase camera and even a top-down view "which makes the game look a bit like Gauntlet", according to Michael.



21▶ Each robot's main mode of transport is on foot, but they are also fitted with limited-fuel jet packs which can be used to give them a short hop over obstacles or onto platforms. The droids can be fitted with up to two weapons (one for each arm) and these range from basic hand-to-hand grappling attachments, like chainsaws, giant clamps and clubs, to projectile weapons, like shotguns, cannons and missiles.

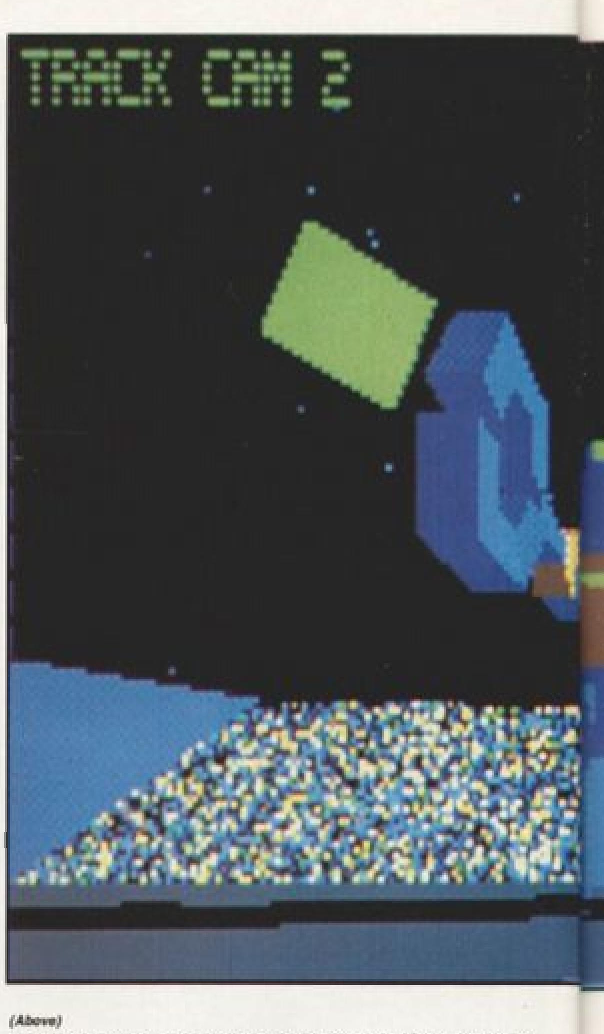
There are six basic arena 'shapes', but each can be packed with any number of features making a near-infinite number of different combat zones. These include such things as platforms (which the player can reach with a squirt from his jet-pack), walls (necessitating the use of mortars to hit the opponent) and re-arming stations (which play a role akin to the pits in a racing game). Adds Michael: "In some arenas there are pools of molten metal. You can grab an opponent with a clamp arm, drag him across the arena and throw him in!"

But there are also some surprises in store for the unwary player. "Some arenas have switches hidden in the floor," explains Michael. "These have various effects. Some buttons turn off the arena's artificial gravity, forcing the robots to fight in zero-G. Others turn off the stadium lighting - if you haven't fitted infra-red vision before the fight then you're left in the dark. The buttons aren't completely hidden - once you know what to look out for you can avoid them or use them to your advantage."

As each battle progresses, the robots gradually erode the other's shields. If the shield gets to low then damage is inflicted on the droid's various faculties. For example, take too much damage in the arm and eventually it'll be blown off, leaving a sparking stump trailing smoke. Naturally, this makes that arm, and the weapon attached to it, useless.

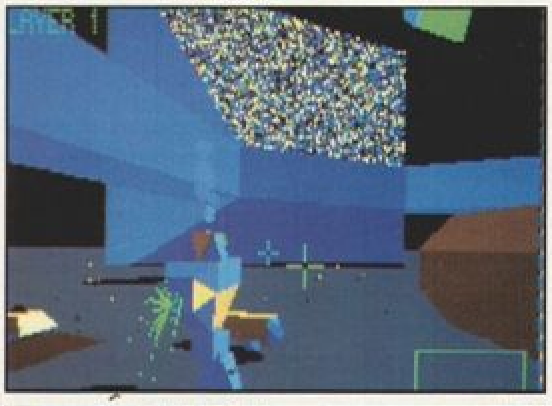
Likewise, take too much damage in one leg and it'll become useless, only leaving you capable of swivelling around. Lose both legs and you'll be crippled. In such a case, it's probably best to eject, though this makes you very vulnerable. The only sanctuary is your re-arming station, but your robot-mounted opponent will be doing his best to stamp you into the ground. And there can be few more trouser-dirtying scenarios than being chased by a belligerent 40-foot robot.

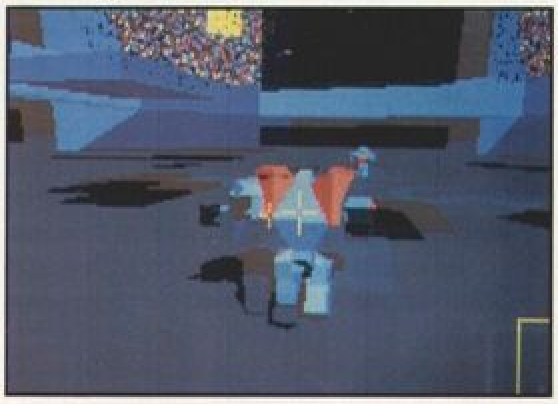
It's the 3D that's the most immediately impressive aspect of Cyber Fight. It's excellent in 16-colour VGA, but it's in 256-colour MCGA that the game really shines - literally! Michael has used a technique called Gouraud shading to simulate highlights on the metal and 'soften' the joins of two polygons. Michael describes it as "a way of making polygons appear to be made up of more polygons than they are actually are."



(Above)
The arm-mounted clamp in all its glory. This can be used to toss enemy droids to their doom in the molten metal pits.

(Below)
Everything in the Cyber Fight world has its own mass and dynamics accurately modelled. Thus, when you blow the arm off a droid (as here) you'll see smoke realistically billowing from the stump and sparks skittering across the floor. "Getting the 3D collisions to work was one of the hardest things about the game," comments Michael. "For example, if a missile hits a robot in the shoulder, you see him get thrown to the side."





Put simply, the shading routine takes a fixed light-source in the arena (for simplicities sake there's only one) and calculates it's effect on the colour of a given polygon at its various edges. The routine then graduates the shading of the colour across the polygon accordingly. "There are better shading routines," comments Michael, "but they take much longer to process." As it is, Gouraud-shaded polygons takes approximately 25% longer to draw than 'normal' polygons.

To maintain an acceptable running time, only the two robots have Gouraud shading applied to them.

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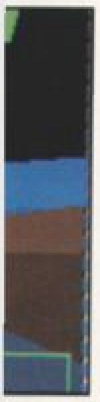

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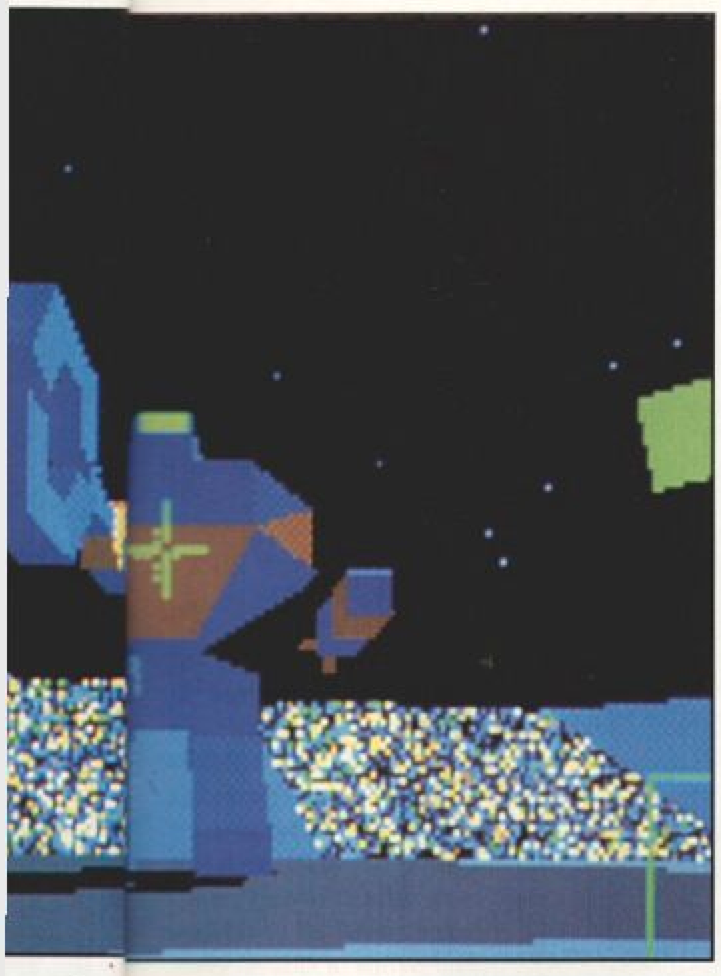


On a 20MHz 286-based PC, with shading and full detail turned on, Michael estimates a typical update of around eight frames per second, increasing to around fourteen with no shading and minimum detail.

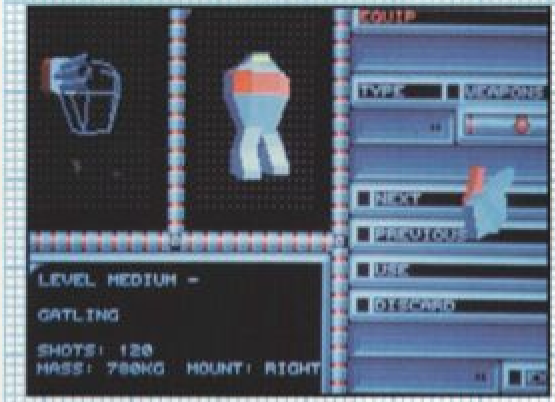
Continues Michael: "I'll definitely be using Gouraud shading again in future games. I also want to use more texture mapping. In Cyber Fight it's restricted to putting images the arena's video wall. Texture mapping makes polygons much more interesting to look at. You could do things like add oil stains or battle scoring to a robot. The trouble is it takes even longer to process than the Gouraud shading because the routine has to remap every pixel of the texture map onto the polygon. For technical reasons the texture mapping will only work in MCGA."

Which are? Come on, ACE readers aren't frightened of a bit of techy information! "Well, in MCGA each pixel is represented by one full byte, but in VGA they are represented by four bits, so you have to do a lot of byte masking which takes up even more time." Ah, I see... I think.

Given Cyber Fight's technical sophistication, what about versions for other computers? "There are plans to convert it onto the Amiga, but nothing's been started yet. I doubt the Amiga version will have the Gouraud shading - the processor just hasn't got the speed to handle it. There might be one object shaded - I don't know yet. The objects will have to simplified too - there are about two-hundred polygons used per robot on the PC game."

Michael is very aware that some people found his previous game *Powerdrome* a little too tricky and frustrating to control: "Trouble is, when you're developing a 3D game it's hard to judge how difficult it is to play because you're always playing it yourself and you get used to the controls. With Cyber Fight we're giving it to people who've never played it before to get their feedback. Also, there will be several help options to make it easier to get into, like gyroscopes to keep the robot stable."

The, if you will, 'shop' screen in its provisional form. The player can use cash won in the arena to buy new weapons and power ups, such as auto-aiming sights for the missile casters and elevation guides for the mortar weapons.

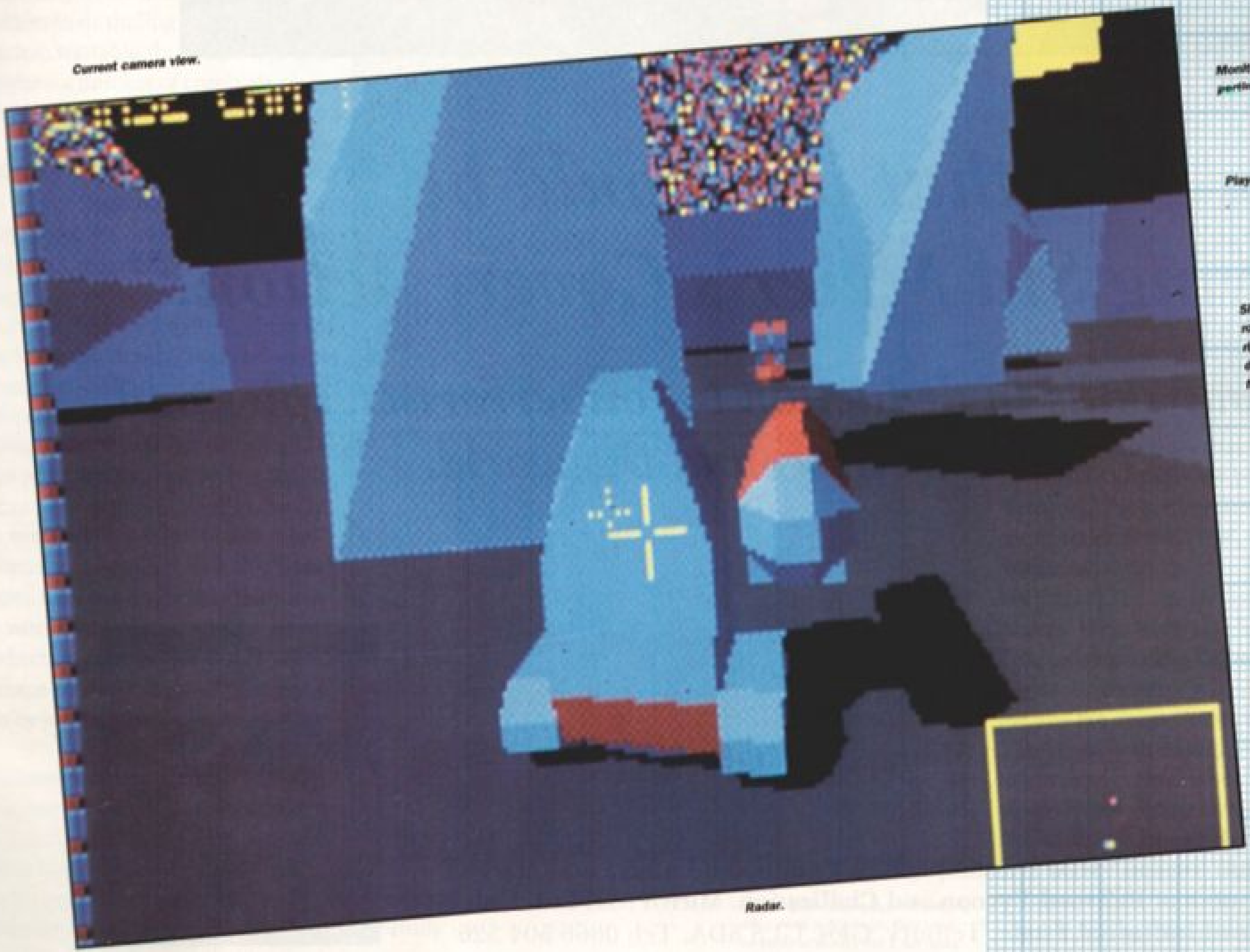


```
LEVEL MEDIUM -
GATLING
SHOTS: 120
MASS: 780KG  MOUNT: RIGHT
```

Although the 3D engine is completely finished and the basic 'bot bashing gameplay will stay, many of the plot specifics and the smaller game design details are still in a state of flux. Although there are ten basic robot 'chassis' in the game, Michael is still debating whether or not to let the player buy a new chassis, or force him stick with one and upgrade parts of it throughout the game. Also, Michael is unsure whether to allow players to store reserve weapons in the re-arming station.

However, with Cyber Fight's release date not likely before late Spring there's plenty of time for Michael to sort things like that out. It's certainly shaping up as a contender for one of 92's best games and I, for one, can't wait to play it (me neither - JD). See you in the arena.

● David Upchurch



Current camera view.

Monitor screen showing pertinent game information.

Player's energy level.

Shield strength indicator for the robot's front, back, left and right. As the robot takes more damage, the colour changes from yellow to red.

Body damage indicator for the player and his opponent.

Radar.

"It's clear from this evidence...

...that we should be playing Sid Meier's Covert Action."

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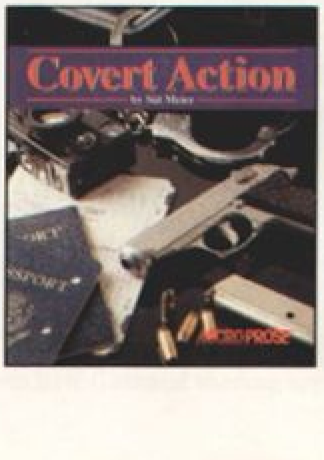


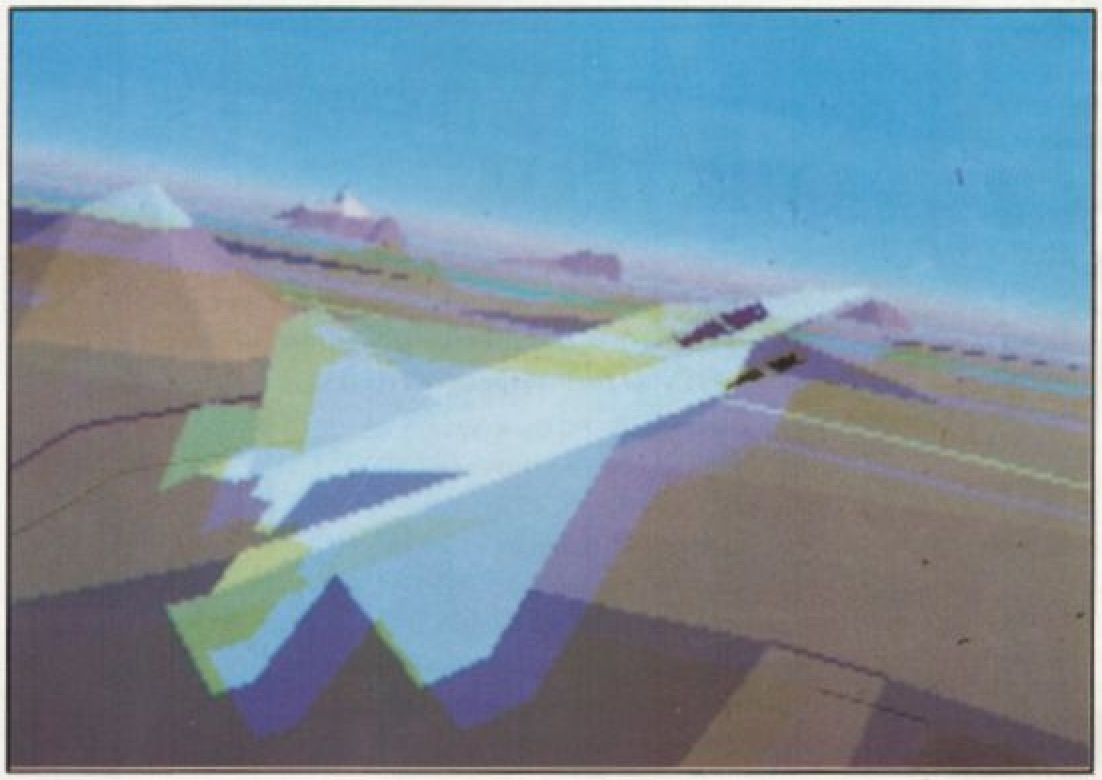
Covert Action, for your IBM PC compatibles, Commodore Amiga and Atari ST from the creators of **Railroad Tycoon** and **Civilization**. MicroProse Ltd. Unit 1, Hampton Road Industrial Estate, Tetbury, Glos. GL8 8DA. Tel: 0666 504 326

ATAC

A year and a half ago, the powers that be at Microprose decided they wanted a flight game that wasn't just another 'F' number, and Argonaut were given the job of producing it. And now they're ready to show the results. ACE visits sunny Tetbury to investigate.

Anyone who has been following the BBC's top-notch copumentary DEA will be aware that winning the war against the drug traffickers is a far more complicated business than simply hustling kids on the streets with runny noses and bleary eyes. Even the regular hauls of millions of dollars worth of cocaine and cannabis seem to be viewed as a mere irritant by the dealers running what is now a meticulously organised global business.

It is a gloomy fact that given the limited resources available to the law enforcement agencies, they will never be able to shut down the narcotics trade. At best they can simply reduce the volume of drugs in circulation.



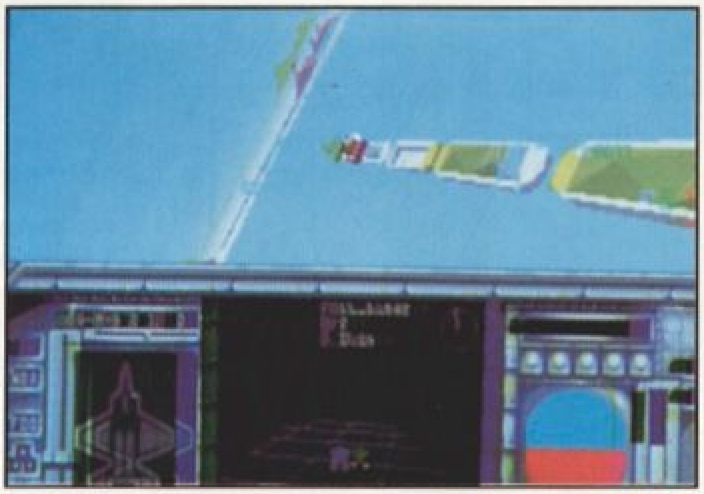
Up, up and away! Freshly fuelled and full of youthful enthusiasm, your drug-busting agents take to the skies in the first of many sorties. It's up to you to decide what sort of activities your pilots will be getting up to, whether they be photographic or destructive in nature.

Clearly a new approach is needed. For years, not entirely stupid people have pointed out that were drugs legalised, the illegal trade would collapse and the drug dealers would no longer need to machine gun schoolchildren in order to claim their trading sites. Whatever, it is indisputable that since trying to imprison a number of criminals equivalent to the population of a small country is rather tricky, attacking the traffickers' purse strings is a more effective way of beginning to win the war.

Given that it's unlikely that a sudden swing in Congress' policy will see the drugs they've fought so hard to keep out of the country legalised, different attacks on the crooks' financial security must be planned.

Microprose's new title, ATAC (Advanced Tactical Air Command), takes place in a thoroughly imaginable future. The drug problem in the US has multiplied and the resident law-enforcement agencies are losing more battles with the traffickers than they are winning. By attacking the actual production sites of the drugs, more damage to the trade would be done than by just seizure of narcotics in transit.

A covert force it set up in Columbia (drug-production capital of the world) and briefed with the mission to disrupt and destroy enough of the countries drug-production industry to help the resident US forces clean up their backlog and - hopefully - to completely bankrupt the drug cartels.



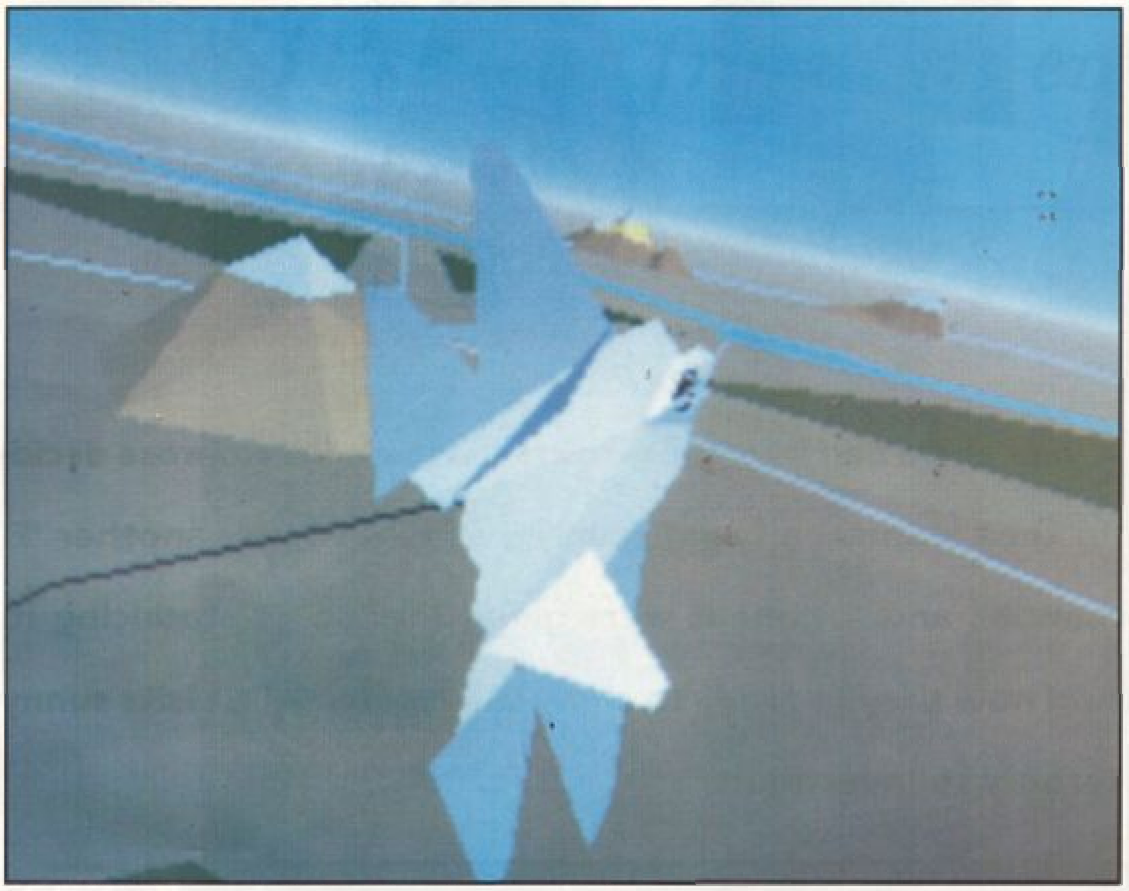
Swooping low over a tug-boat carrying illicit drugs in it's cargo. Care must be taken to destroy ONLY the tanks with the drugs in.

A sizable departure from most Microprose games of late, ATAC combines both strategy and 3D flight elements. The player takes the role of the supreme commander of the ATAC, controlling all operations from a secret underground base in Columbia itself. He has at his disposal four F-22 jets and two helicopters. From within his base he can amass reports from reconnaissance flights and his spies positioned across the country, gradually building a picture of the way the drugs cartels work.

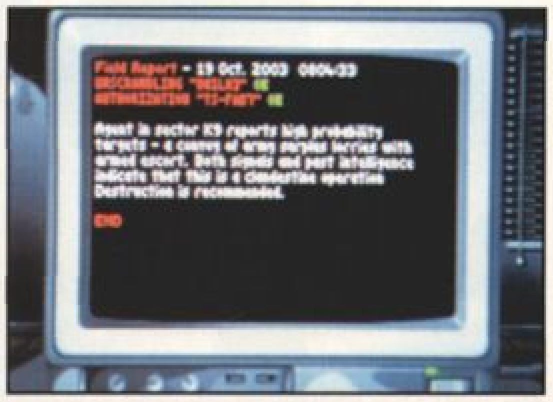
To begin with the player has extremely limited information at his disposal. From the map he knows where farms and factories, roads and railways lie. But he doesn't know if the farms a producing drugs or crops, and he doesn't know what goods are being transported in the trucks.

Since neither the growth or harvesting of the cannabis plant is illegal in Columbia it is perfectly

►26



Argonaut's brief from Microprose was to produce a flight game that was "not just another F-number" Flight fans need not worry, though. No degree of accuracy has been spared, and up to six aircraft can be airborn at once



Your' intelligence reports from agents on the ground yield vital information and should be carefully heeded. You don't want to go blowing up a truck load of cuddly toys heading for an orphanage, do you?

Field Report - 19 Oct. 2003 0804:33

Agent in sector K9 reports high probability targets - a convoy of army surplus lorries with armed escort. Both signals and port intelligence indicate that this is a clandestine operation. Destruction is recommended.

END

25▶ plausible for honest farmers to be growing the drugs amongst their other crops. And as the operation is only underway thanks to the ambivalence of the Columbian government, it is vital that the player neither destroys innocent crops or kills civilians. Instead, the drugs themselves must be removed.

What distinguishes the game from most is that the player is free to decide how much of his game will comprise strategy and planning and how much will comprise actually flying the aircraft at his disposal. In theory, at least, the player controls the action from his base. At the beginning of each day once the intelligence information has been gathered, it's time to examine the map and lay down instructions for the Command's aircraft.

Unusually for a Microprose flight game there are no set missions. It's entirely up to the player to decide how he wants to wage war on the stinking drug barons. Only logical, after all, since the player is supposed to be running the entire operation and is responsible for its strategy.

If the player's intelligence reveals that a convoy of trucks is leaving from a farm and heading for a factory and the factory is a known drug refinery, it's likely that there will be some drugs amongst the cargo. Another reconnaissance mission is necessary to determine which vehicles are carrying the drugs before a strike mission can take place.

Use of the 'smart' way-point system means that the player can set a course and detailed instructions for each of his aircraft in turn, having previously armed them with an appropriate balance of hardware.

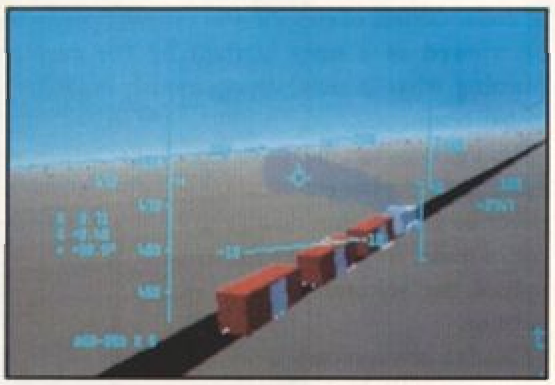
Once this side of the mission is taken care of, the action can begin. Players unhappy dirtying their hands with the mechanics of actual flight can sit back and watch the mission as it is carried out by a set of automated pilots. Each pilot is set to have the same elite skills and will perform his mission as briefed to the best of his ability.

At any stage during the mission, however, the player can leap into and take control of any active aircraft, providing that it isn't below 1,000 feet. In particular, if a single train carriage needs to be destroyed and there is a risk of harm coming to innocent bystanders or crops, it's advisable to take control, lest the computer controlled pilot have an uncharacteristic bombing frenzy. Once the 32▶

THE TEAM

In total, ten members of the Argonaut team are responsible for ATAC in its various incarnations. Let the record show that the following 'geezers' deserve recognition for their respective efforts.

Sam Littlewood - PC Gameplay
Mike Beaton - PC Flight Dynamics
Alastair McNally - PC Artwork
Tom Ashton - PC Artwork
Mike Day - PC 3D Graphics
Danny Emmett - PC 3D Shapes
Adam Polanski - Amiga General Code
Jonathan Wolf - Amiga General Code
Peter Leaback - 3D Code
Richard Clucas - Overall Project Management



Destroying a central carriage or a train will hault the progress of the cars which are not connected to the engine.

This bit is, erm, not quite finished yet. It's the bit where the player actually lays down his orders for what his aircraft actually do on their mission. It'll probably end up being icon controlled.

They might be a bit fat, but they sure can use binoculars. These are your spies.

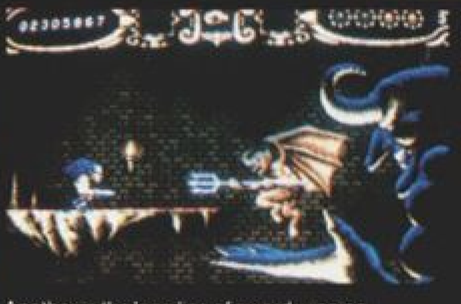
ALL THAT IS EVIL IS ALL THAT IS MYTH

MYTH
HISTORY IN THE MAKING

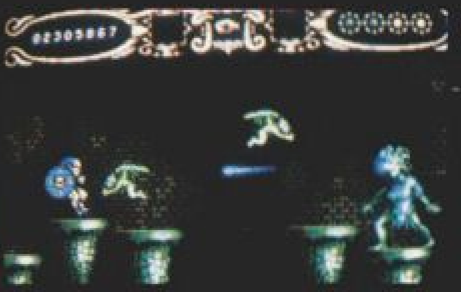
Magical tales of intrigue and mystery were spawned thousands of years ago, as the worlds civilisations believed that mythological Gods and demons carved out the way of the world. They were said to have dealt their own hand in the epic game of life and ruled with cast iron law and powerful sorcery.

Something has now gone wrong...
Someone must stop the spread of evil

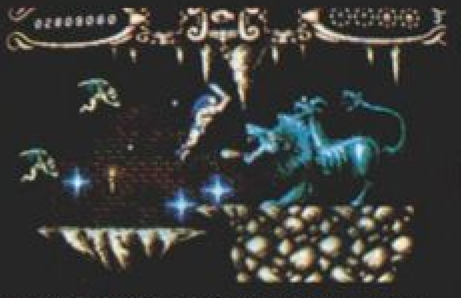
YOU ARE THE CHOSEN ONE...



Another in the long line of award winning classics from the System 3 stable, Myth brings the magical mysteries of historic, demonic gods into the very heart of your home.



With a truly epic introduction sequence, this superb game will pull you through a new dimension of computer fantasy.



Brilliant character animations have you jumping and slaying your way through a true award winning classic. Having scooped all the major awards on the smaller home computers, Myth looks set to emulate that success on the Amiga and Atari ST.

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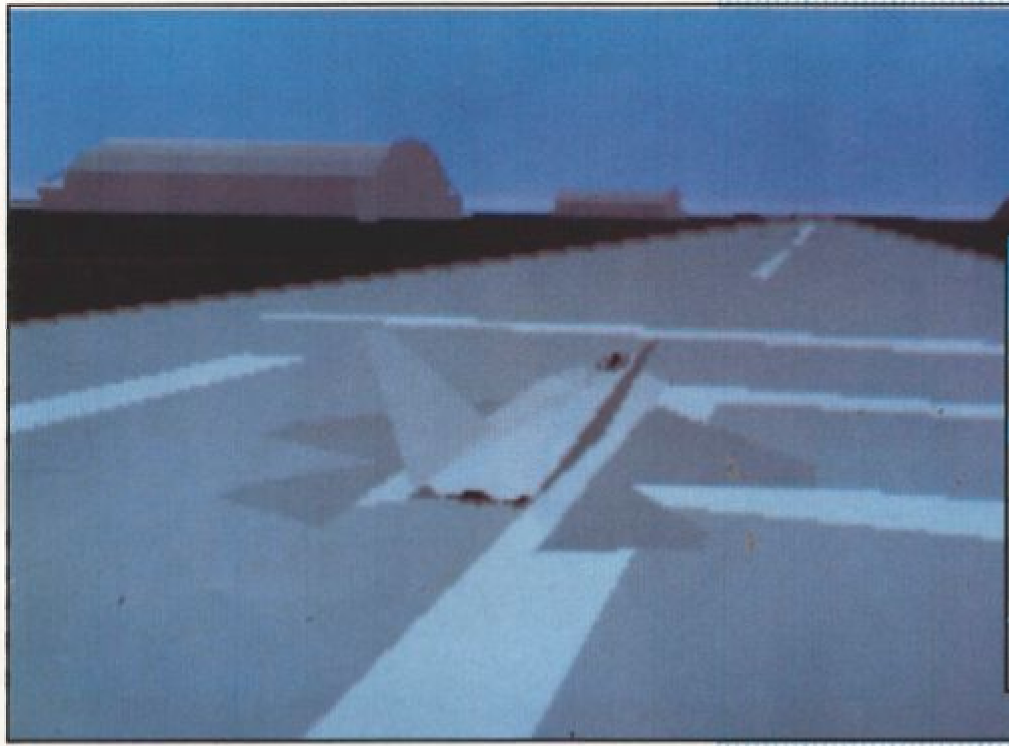
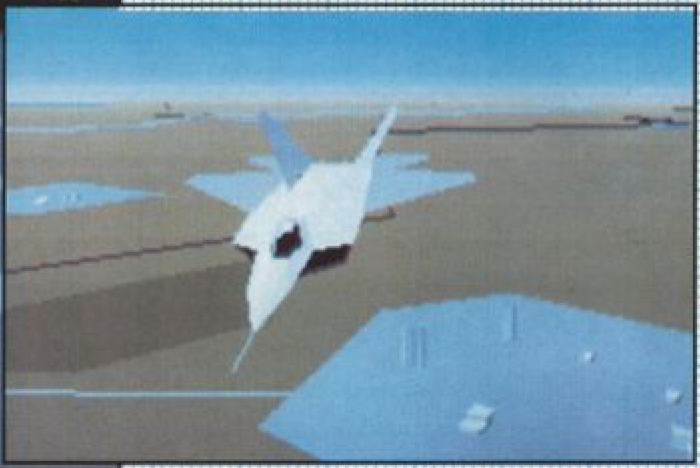
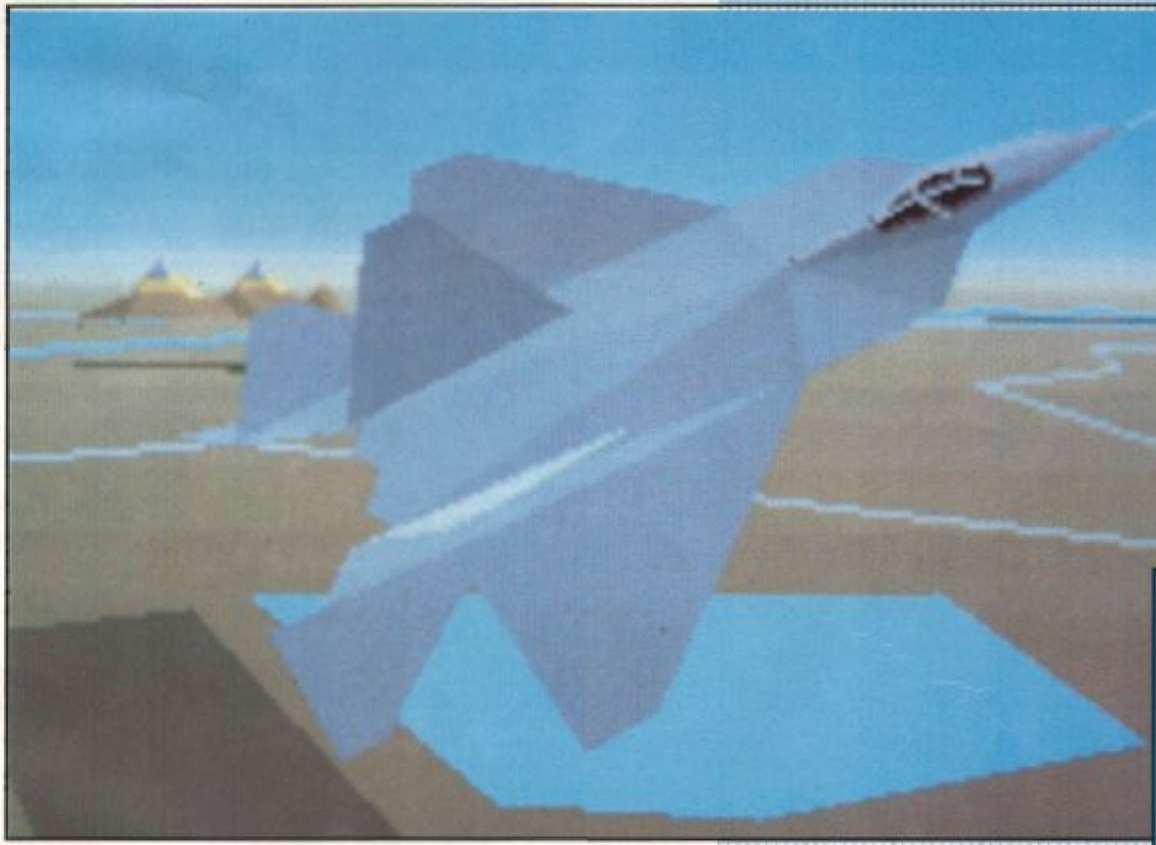
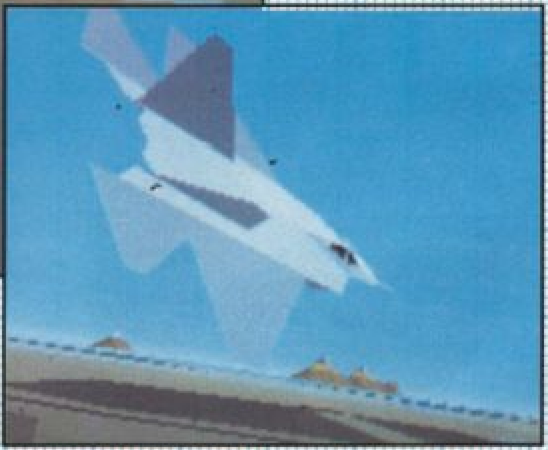




The player can leap in and out of any active aircraft at any time, so long as they're not landing (like this one)



All at Microprose are confident that ATAC is going to be a very big hit. It's the blend of different styles which they feel will bring in the games players who don't necessarily go for their products, while still keeping enough polygons around to entertain their regular customers. As you can see from these pics, they're not wrong.



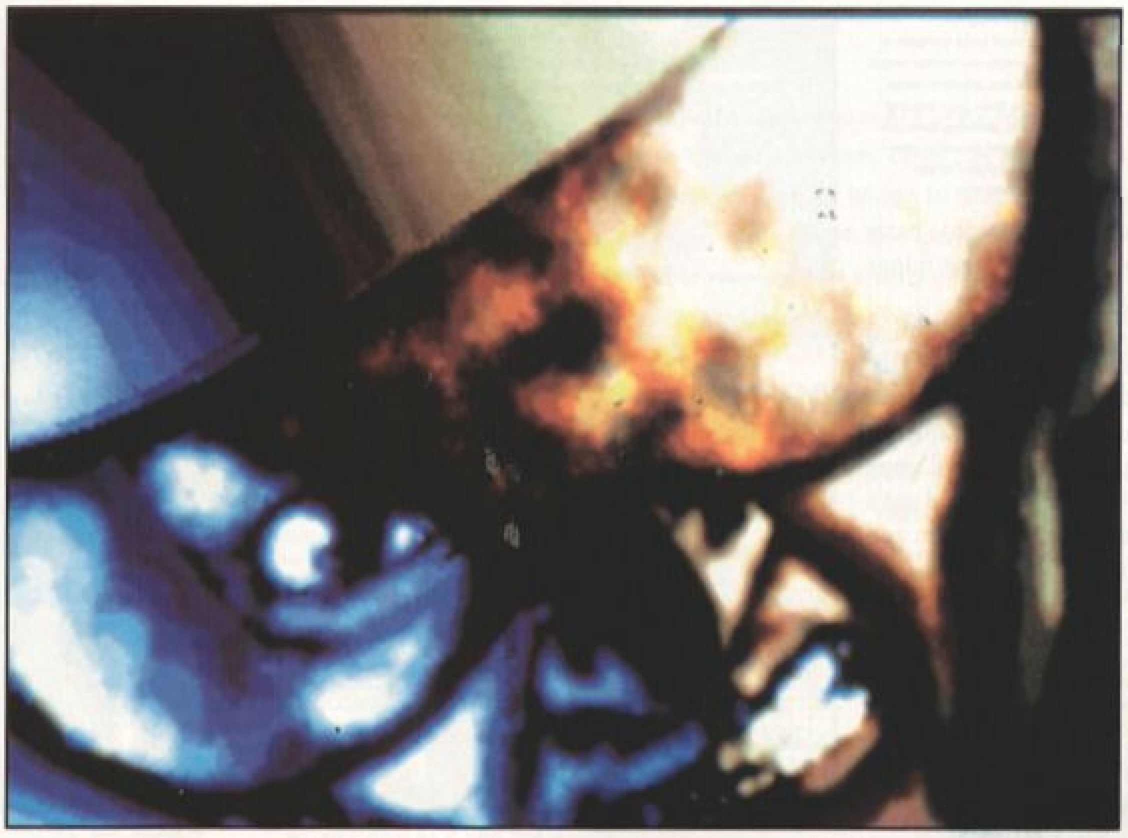
26▸ player has had his fill of controlling an aircraft, he can jump back to base and the plane will resume its mission under automatic control.

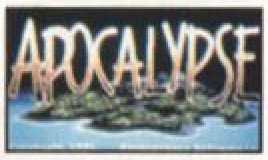
Again, care must be taken while planning the missions. Blowing up railroads and roads will certainly hamper the drugs' progress across the country, but it also makes it impossible for food and other vital supplies to move around.

ATAC is shaping up to be an extremely impressive game. On a number of counts aspects have been included which most flight/strategy games have been crying out for. While reading through intelligence reports, the player can click on a particular piece of information and then be automatically greeted by the appropriate map section. By positioning way points on mobile objects, it's possible to track them automatically with spy planes and so on. And downed pilots from your team can even be rescued if you feel that the effort and spend necessary is justified.

And quite aside from it being one of the more exciting strategy premises to have emerged recently, it's a cracking combat flight simulator too. Intelligence reports suggest it'll be available for review next month.

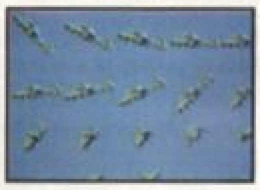
● Jim Douglas





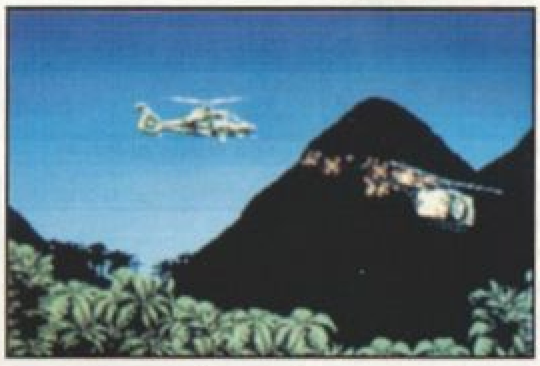
(Left) Dokk's mock-up title screen (produced on a VGA PC) sums up the mood of Apocalypse perfectly - just grit your teeth, stare maniacally at the screen and let rip. Strangeways are hoping to have something like this for the game's final box illustration.

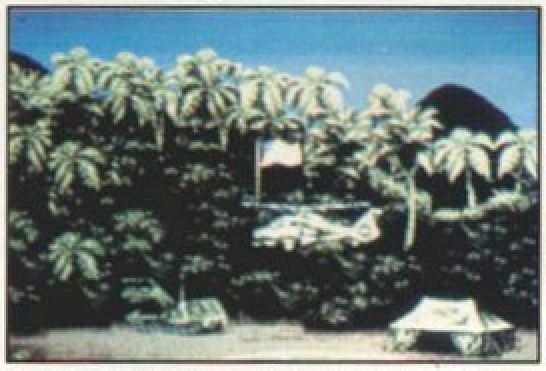
(Below) One of Apocalypse's most impressive graphical aspects is the super-smooth animation on the helicopter when it turns around. Not surprising, considering the sequence takes eleven individual frames - all of which are shown here.



APOCALYPSE

Deep in the heart of dreary Watford, a hand-picked team of game design gurus are planning to inject some "oomph" back into the shoot-'em-up genre. And judging by what's on screen so far, they might just do it, too. ACE went down to find out why everyone is talking about Jason Perkins' chopper...





The player must bring his collected refugees back here to the safe US camp before they can disembark and be counted as safe. If any rebels are wounded on the ground, the chopper can collect a stretcher team from the nearby red cross tent and fly them out to pick them up.

What would Alf Garnett say if he played computer games? Well, apart from his usual sideswipes at everything under the sun, he'd probably have a good old rant about how games these days are far too bleedin' poncy and toffee-nosed. Bleedin' 'ell. And do you know what? He'd be absolutely right. Though the ultra-sophisticated simulations and strategy products turned out by the likes of Microprose and Electronic Arts are all worthwhile and commendable games, it's arguable that these more IQ-intensive affairs are becoming a bit too commonplace, and that the art of the good old arcade game is fast becoming lost as a result.

And that's a real shame, because we owe those games a heck of a lot - where would we be today without Space Invaders, or Defender? Be honest, when was the last time you played a really rollicking shoot-'em-up? Hmmm, been a while, hasn't it? Just what is the world coming to? Have we forgotten our roots?

There's one bloke, at least, who's not about to let us forget how much fun a good old session of trigger-thumping can still be. Veteran programmer Jason Perkins is on a one-man mission to ensure that the classic shoot-'em-up is put firmly back on the pedestal where it belongs. He, along with his cohorts at recently-formed development team Strangeways, is currently beavering away on a tasty little number by the name of Apocalypse, and the concept behind it is simple. No frills. No bullshit. Just rock-hard killing and death with property damage to the power of ten and the player caught in the middle of it all.

Perkins is no lilly-livered new boy when it comes to producing arcade games - over the years he's been responsible for some of the finest, including the 8-bit classics Thing on a Spring and Monty on the Run. And his reasons for writing Apocalypse now are as down-to-earth as the game itself. "It basically all comes from playing Choplifter," he explains. "The thing about the game is that it's got really simple graphics and bog-standard presentation, but it's just really playable. What we've tried to do with Apocalypse is capture the essence of that playability, but bring it into the 90s."

Actually, you don't need Jason to tell you that his game is based on Choplifter - anybody who's seen Dan Gorlin's ancient shoot-'em-up classic will instantly recognise the similarities. The basic idea is much the same - take to the controls of a state-of-the-art helicopter gunship and fly deep into enemy territory to airlift frantic refugees to safety. But while

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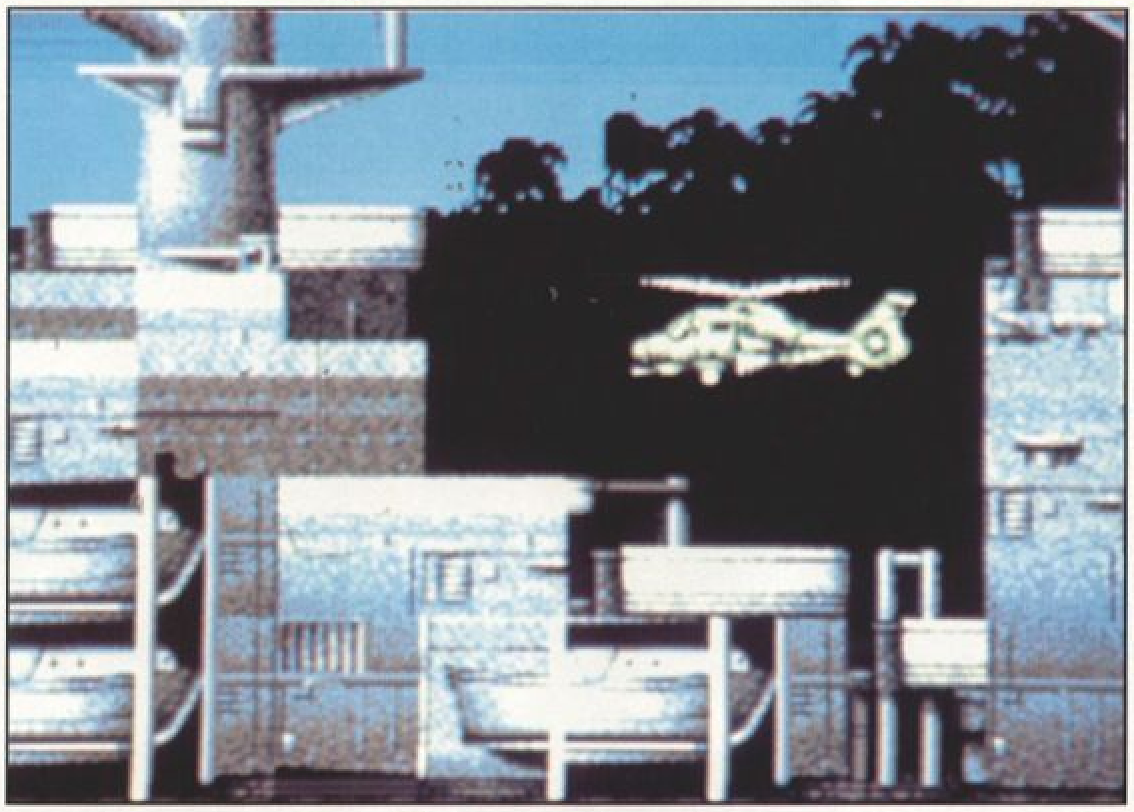

In classic R-Type tradition, Apocalypse's third level consists of this gigantic enemy battleship which takes up about five whole screens. "We're going to have guys running up and down the gantries, cannons that fire at you and gunships that launch from the helipad at the back," Jason enthuses.

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Choplifter offered little more than just that basic premise, Perkins is promising much bigger things of Apocalypse.

"Basically, we wanted to improve upon the original Choplifter in just about every way," he reveals. "The thing about the game was that there wasn't really much to do. The landscape was completely flat, you had a few buildings to crash into and some tanks shooting up at you. Occasionally you'd get a jet plane, which would just zoom on screen and crash into you, and that was that, really. For Apocalypse, though, we've tried to make everything as realistic as possible, with a wide variety of opponents, different levels, lots of objectives and the sort of presentation that people expect from a classy 16-bit product these days."

Apocalypse's scenario tells of a hitherto obscure island somewhere in the Indian Ocean, where the people live under the iron boot of a fascist dictatorship. When huge deposits of Uranium are discovered deep underground, the moustache-twiddling El Presidente sets about mining it for the purposes of building his own nuclear bomb. The population is, however, less than happy about this, and stage a peasant's uprising.

Before you know it, there's a civil war raging between government forces and the new rebel army. Enter Uncle Sam, who's not overly chuffed about this aggravation (or the prospect of the volatile nation acquiring a nuclear weapon) and sends in its own troops and advisers to assist the rebels. But it all goes horribly wrong and the US force is quickly overrun by the fascist army. Now you've been called in, as the top crack elite helicopter pilot in the army, to fly in and rescue as many of the beleaguered rebel/US forces as possible, before the junta wipes them out completely.

Played over five levels, Apocalypse has the player flying his chopper over a series of wartorn battle zones. As the bullets fly on the ground, you've got to land in the middle of it all, pick up as many of the fleeing rebels as possible, and get them back to the US camp located nearby. Obviously the fascist forces are out to stop any rescue attempts, so the player finds himself up against attacks from shoulder-launched Stinger missiles, machine-gunning jeeps, enemy helicopters, tanks and even the ground troops themselves.

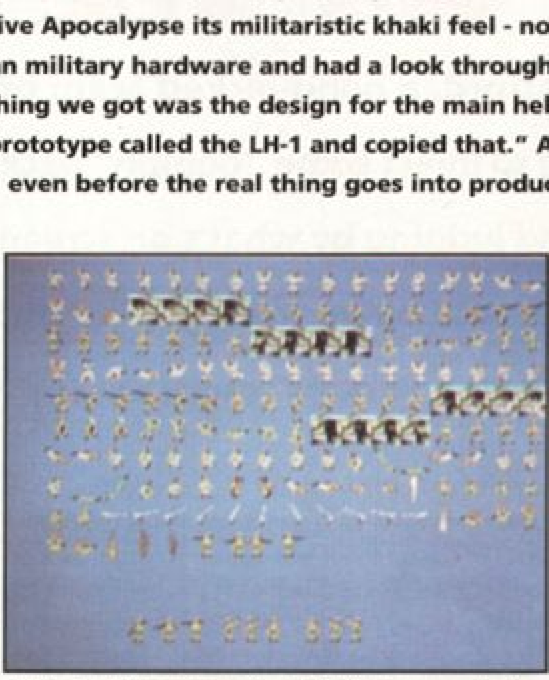
As machine-gun fire and missile warheads streak through the air at you, it becomes increasingly difficult to land and get the rebels to safety. And if they can't get to you, the enemy will be quite happy to take out your precious hostages. Helicopter gunships kill them by strafing the ground, while the gun-toting soldiers simply pick them off as they try to scramble aboard the chopper.

Of course, the player isn't entirely helpless, and can retaliate by means of a vicious cockpit-mounted cannon as well as with droppable mines and an awesome napalm flamethrower. You might imagine that with all this going on, things could get pretty hectic - and you'd be right. With all its explosions, crashing, clanging, banging and shooting, there's enough action in Apocalypse to keep Stormin' Norman in bed with an ice pack on his head for a week.

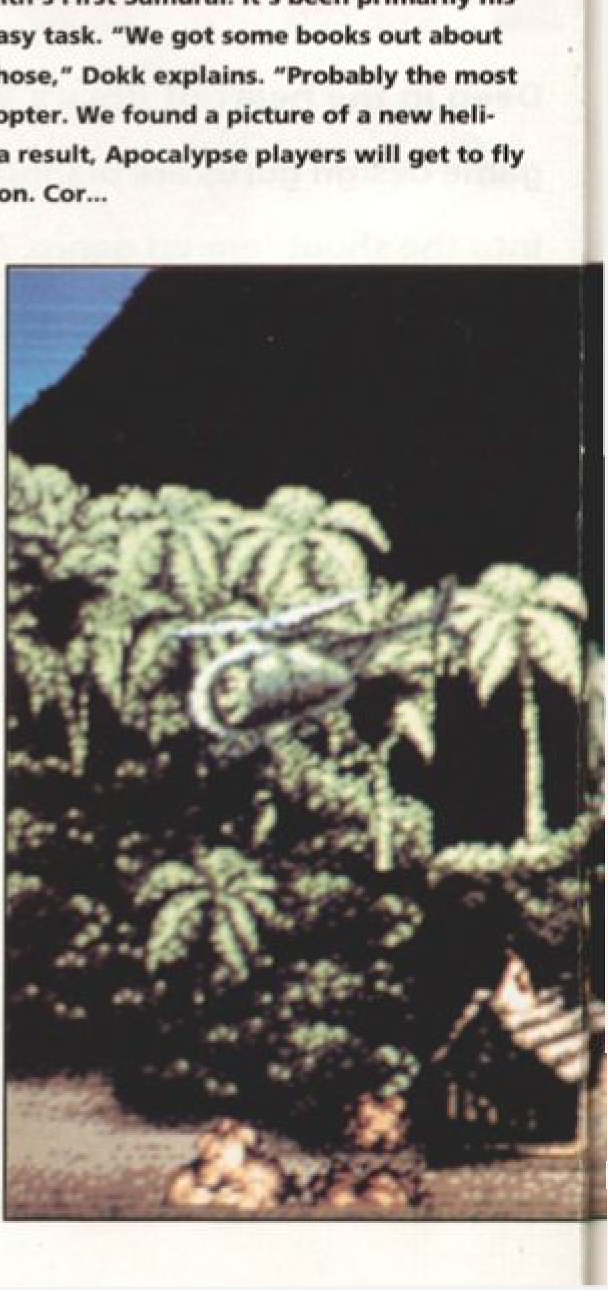
Since the inception of the project in September last year, Perkins has been adamant that Apocalypse's more sophisticated approach and plethora of new

OPPORTUNITY DOKKS

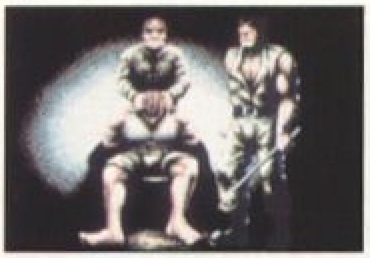
Apocalypse's distinctive graphics are the work of veteran artist Paul 'Dokk' Docherty, who first cut his teeth on the Commodore 64 several years back and has since been providing quality visuals for games like Last Ninja III, Myth and this month's First Samurai. It's been primarily his job to give Apocalypse its militaristic khaki feel - no easy task. "We got some books out about American military hardware and had a look through those," Dokk explains. "Probably the most useful thing we got was the design for the main helicopter. We found a picture of a new helicopter prototype called the LH-1 and copied that." As a result, Apocalypse players will get to fly the LH-1 even before the real thing goes into production. Cor...

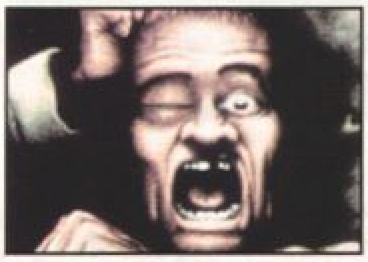


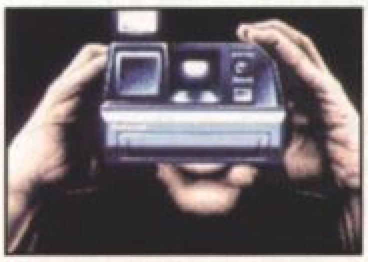
Dokk's sprite development screen shows all the little geezers encountered in the game. As well as the rebels, enemy soldiers and missile-firers, included here are the animation frames for when the rebels bundle into the rescue bay of the helicopter. "The toughest part," says Dokk, "has been getting the men to animate realistically, because they're so little."

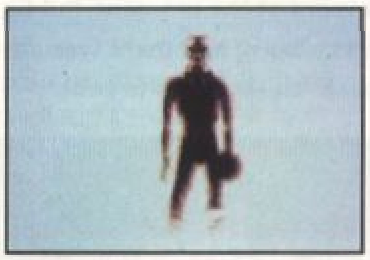


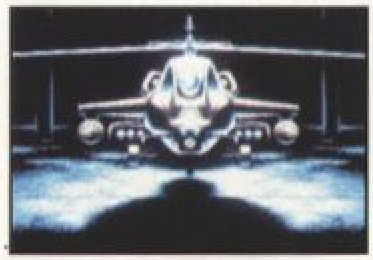
(Left) The action hots up on level one - The Valley. Better get down there and pick those rebels up before that enemy chopper turns around and toasts 'em...











The scene in Apocalypse is set by an atmospheric opening sequence produced by Dokk, where one of the rebels - and as it happens, the best buddy of the player - is captured by government forces, tortured and then executed. Having already received a thorough beating (he's got a black-eye, missing teeth and a blood-stained vest) the unfortunate chap is bound to a chair in a dimly-lit cellar and has his leg broken by a burly guard. As he screams in agony a mysterious figure takes a Polaroid snapshot of him. Then a gun is held to his head and... well, the rest is left to the imagination. The last thing we see is a blood-spattered photograph of the tortured man.

From there the screen is filled with a blinding light and from it, like an avenging angle, steps the figure of the seething helicopter pilot, anxious for revenge. The huge bay doors to the aircraft hangar slide open and sunlight sweeps inside, revealing the awesome shape of the LH-1 gunship. The rest, as they say, is up to you...

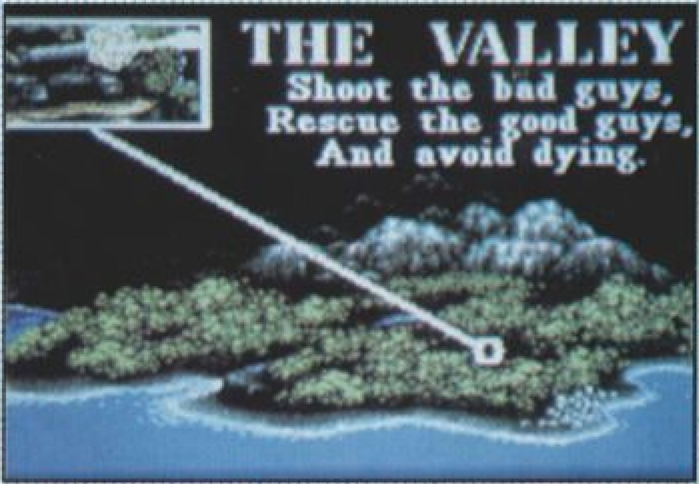
Incidentally, Strangeways are planning an even more graphic and elaborate "outro" sequence for when the player wins the game, in which the pilot finally gets his revenge on the commie scum who waxed his buddy.

SOUND!

Get that volume cranked up, as Apocalypse players are promised an aural explosion. Binary maestro Richard Joseph, who has scored countless games in the past (his most recent work was Mega lo Mania) is handling the music and FX, which Perkins promises will go along with the game's military feel. "We're going for lots of Full Metal Jacket-style drumbeats and trumpeting to get the adrenalin going," he explains. Meetings are currently being held to see how many sampled effects Richard will be able to squeeze in, but in the meantime the Strangeways lads have put together some effects of their own - the most impressive of which are the thwacking of the helicopter's rotor blades (sampled from The Killing Fields) and an outrageously camp "Ouch" sound, provided by Strangeways' roly-poly co-founder Gary Liddon, for when the bad guys get wasted. It'll be in the final game, Jason assures us...

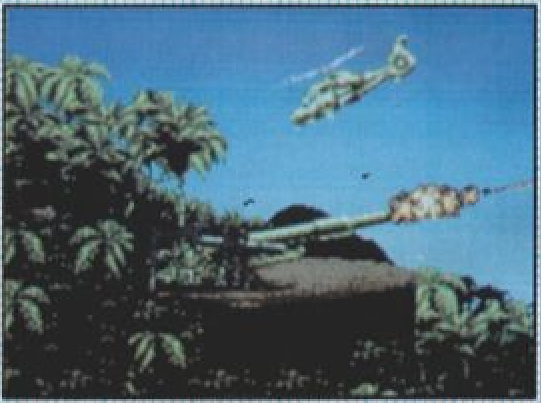
features shouldn't detract from the basic gameplay 'crux' - that of fast and frenetic blasting mayhem. "We toyed with the idea of being able to crash the helicopter into buildings and things, and having the player avoiding them, but it just didn't work. The player doesn't want to have to worry about too many things - he just wants to get down to it and get it sorted." It's experimentation like this that has allowed Jason to sort the wheat ideas from the chaff, and as a result come up with a game that - hopefully - adds greatly to the original Choplifter experience without losing the classic feel and appeal. And from what's up and running so far, he's been very successful.

Before each level, a military-style briefing informs the player of his objective. A target reticle swoops in to pinpoint the location on the island where the action will take place, and an inset picture gives a small clue as to how things might be made easier. "On each level there's one objective that, if completed, makes life a lot easier for the player," Perkins explains. "On the first level, for example, there's this massive howitzer cannon that's constantly shelling your men. If you can knock that out, the actual rescuing is much easier."

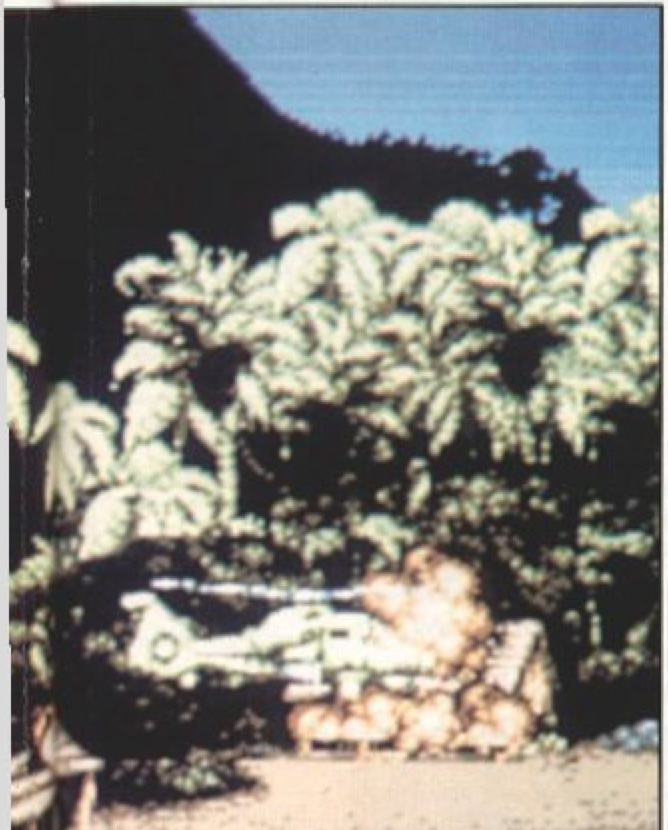


THE VALLEY
Shoot the bad guys,
Rescue the good guys,
And avoid dying.

Probably the most crucial aspect in Apocalypse, and one that has recently led to it attracting a lot of attention from all quarters, is its rather impressive sense of hard-nosed realism. Perkins admits that he gets right browned off when he sees games that cop out with stupid little blobs for bullets and half-arsed explosions. So he's gone to lengths to ensure an authentic feel for Apocalypse.



Bullets travel at realistic speeds - i.e. hitting their targets immediately as they are fired - people really get shot and blown up, damaged helicopters fall burning from the sky and crash into the ground... there's no end to the little touches that give the game a unique hard edge. It should come as a refreshing change to desensitised shoot-'em-up fans who have been playing the arcade equivalent of bromide for quite a while now.



Some people, however, may think that Apocalypse, with its disturbing opening sequence and multitude of violent in-game effects takes the point of aggressive authenticity a bit too far. And though Perkins dismisses the argument, care must be taken if the game is to take off in places like Germany, where the over-cautious policy on computer violence has led to titles like Silent Service and Barbarian being withdrawn in the past. That's why Apocalypse is being officially marketed as a 'rescue game', with the emphasis placed on the safe extraction of the hostages rather than the massive property damage and OTT body count it entails. "You don't win Apocalypse by blowing everything up - you win by getting the rebels out to safety," says Perkins. "So theoretically you can win the game without killing anyone at all."

In its present state, only the first level of Apocalypse is anything like playable - it's almost complete, in fact. Jason is currently tossing design ideas for the later levels with the rest of the Apocalypse team. The plan is to add more bits and pieces, gradually as the player progresses from stage to stage. "We've got a level called Beach City, which is a Beirut sort of thing, really," Jason explains. "There'll tanks trundling down the roads, and what we hope to do is have people hanging out of windows and stuff. You'll be able to land on the roofs of the buildings and pick up people from there."

As well as the level designs, Jason is umming and aahing about what other opponents to put in. "We want to have more aerial baddies, so we're going to

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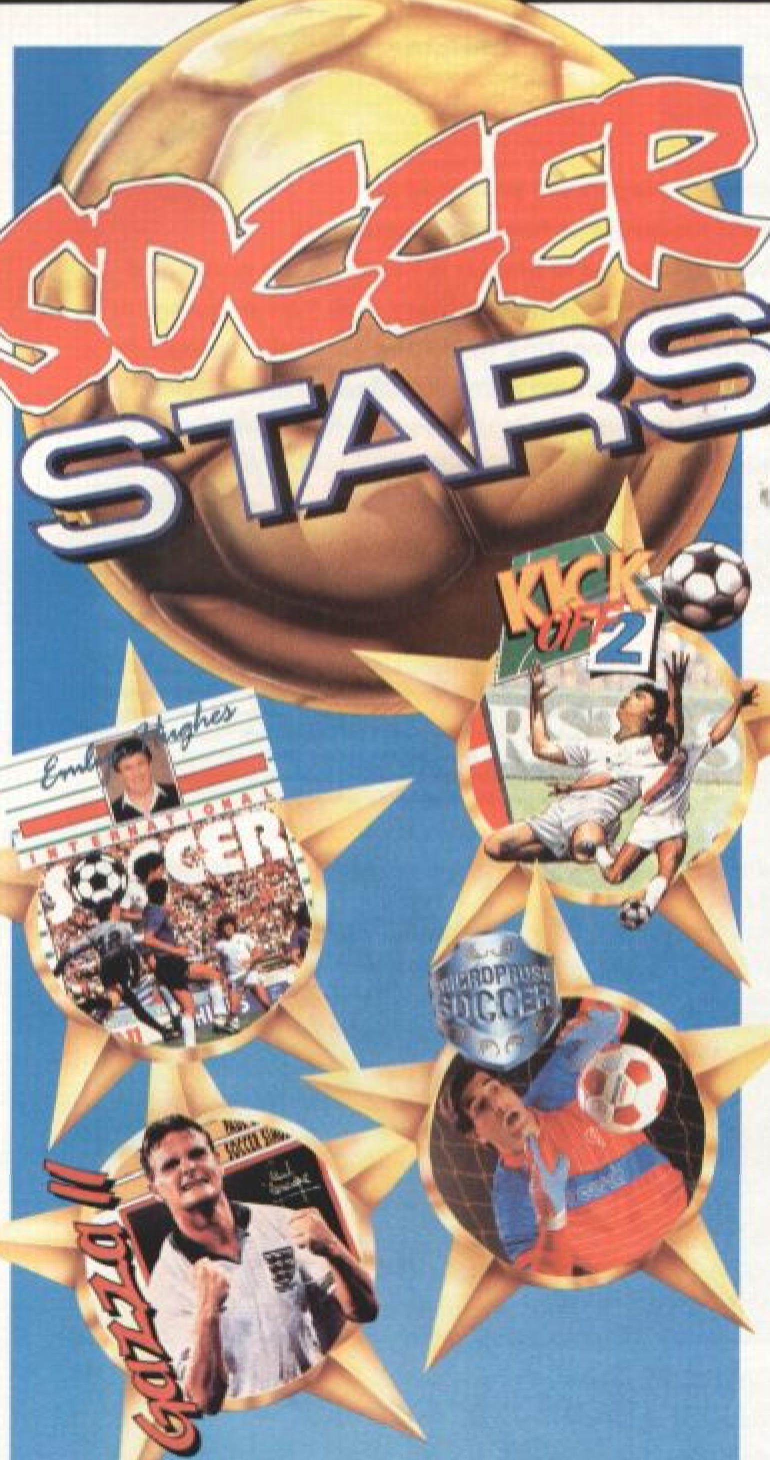

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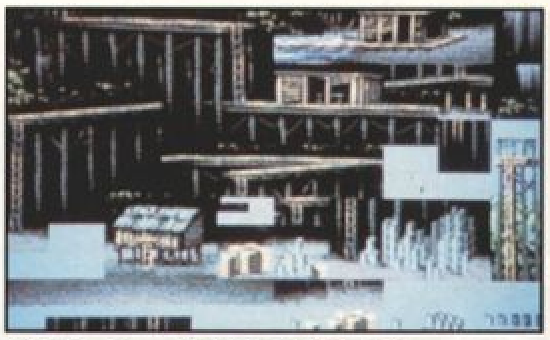
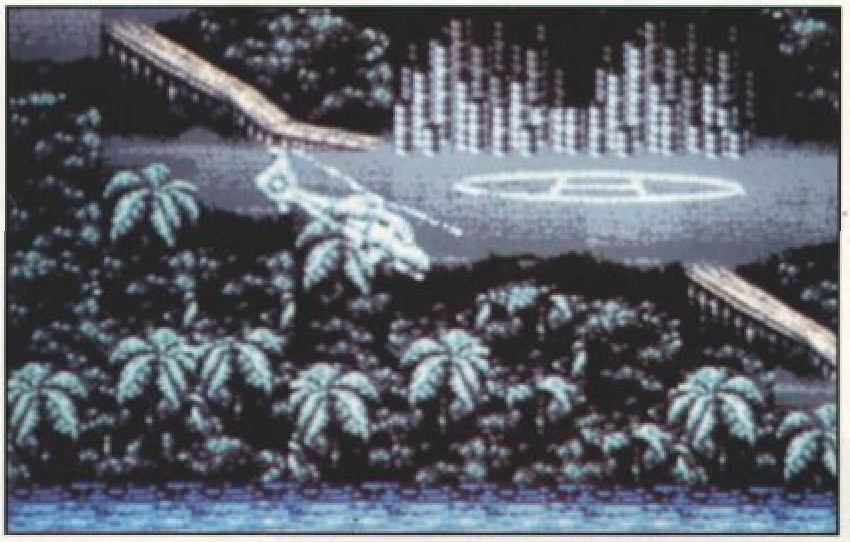


WHAT'S IN A NAME?

Quite a lot, actually. Apocalypse was originally to be called Rebel, with Perkins developing the game under that name right from the start - but things changed when Mirrorsoft stepped in to sign it. "I don't think anybody was really that pleased with Rebel as a name," says Jason. "When we had one of our first meetings with Mirrorsoft, John Norledge, who's the head of development there, suggested Apocalypse - he's a really big Apocalypse Now fan, you see." Since Coppola's classic war odyssey was in fact another source of inspiration for the game, the name stuck and that was that. "I think the name's going to go down really well," says Jason. "It seems to be a very popular word at the moment. Public Enemy's just released its Apocalypse 91 album, and there was an episode of Bottom called Apocalypse, so it's really quite cool."



(Above) Level Two is set in the island's prison camp, where many of the rebel forces have been incarcerated. While avoiding the constant assaults from enemy machine-gun nests, the player must blow open the huts where the rebels are kept, then pick them up as they scramble out onto the landscape.

(Top) One of Dokk's working graphic screens illustrates how the prison camp level - along with all the others - are built up of small building blocks. The graphics are designed on Dpaint in manageable pieces, then joined together into one big scrolling game area using Jason's custom-made editor program.

26 ▶want to have more aerial baddies, so we're going to be doing another type of helicopter, a big gunship that fires missiles at you. Planes don't work because they're too fast, but someone suggested a jetpack guy, and we might do that."

Because Apocalypse is such a simple game, it's easy to assume that the programming job has been just as easy. Not so, as Jason doesn't mind telling you. Unlike Choplifter, Apocalypse scrolls in eight directions with silhouetted background and foreground layers providing extra depth to the scenery. Putting everything together on Strangeways' custom-built editors has not been easy. "The biggest problem has been getting everything to run quickly when there are so many sprites on screen," says Jason. "But I think we've done alright."

Apocalypse gets cleared for take-off on the Image Works label next Spring on Amiga and ST. And judging by how the game's looking so far, Jason's desire to bring the shoot-'em-up back in style in the most outrageously excellent manner imaginable may not be so far-fetched after all. Hang on to your helmets...

● **Gary Whitta**

ADVERTISEMENT FEATURE

"THE BEST RPG/ADVENTURE GAME OF THE YEAR,* JUST GOT BETTER..!!"

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But ultimately, you'll need to find the legendary Ancient leader who has been reportedly dead for 300,000 years!

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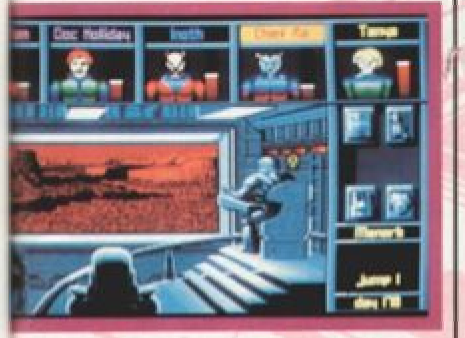
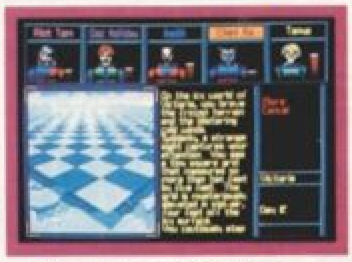


For years, Traveller was the undisputed champion of science fiction role playing. A game of unprecedented magnitude, there was no aspect of spacefiring adventure that Traveller didn't handle, and handle exquisitely. Then along came Megatraveller, a complete redesign of the original Traveller that stands as one of the most remarkable gaming achievements of the last decade.

Superbly designed, Megatraveller was quoted as the pinnacle of science fiction role-playing.



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The game begins as you and your party set out to stop the slime producing Ancient sites on Rhylanor. There are 127 detailed worlds to explore with hundreds of cities and millions of square miles.

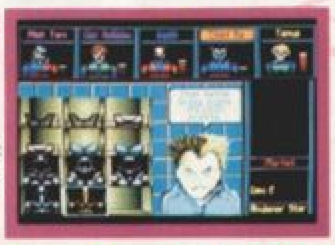
You can travel from planet to planet aboard commercial starships, or one of your characters may own his own ship. Explore hundreds of locations including cities, data terminals, starships with deck plans, gambling casinos, stores and shops, taverns, trade and commerce outlets, vehicle rental locations, character recruitment centres, crashed and abandoned ships and Ancient sites.

At each of the Ancient sites, you can discover artifacts and relics that can help the crisis situation on Rhylanor. By helping the situation, you will receive very significant rewards, which will help you to buy passage, or even acquire your own ship so that you can continue your quest.

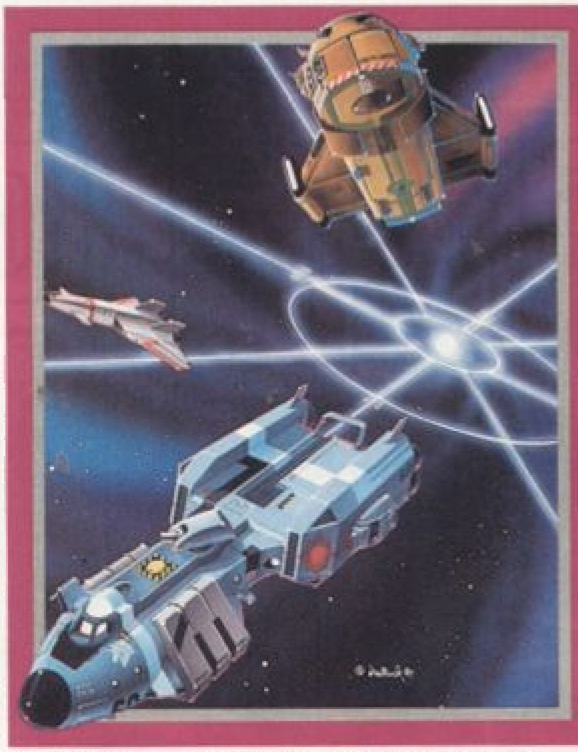
Throughout your adventure, you will be pursued by agents of the secret organisation.

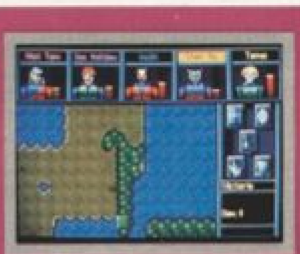
As well as a main plot, there are dozens of sub-plots on the various worlds, and even aboard starships, to keep you and your party busy.

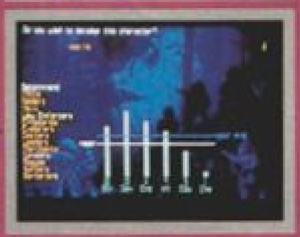
You will be confronted with interesting adventures filled with mystery, danger and intrigue.

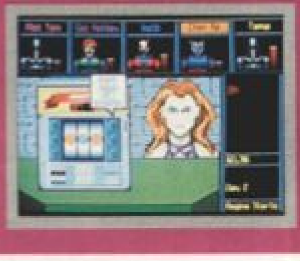


Megatraveller 2: Quest for the Ancients is a unique and innovative role-playing adventure that goes leaps and bounds beyond Megatraveller 1.









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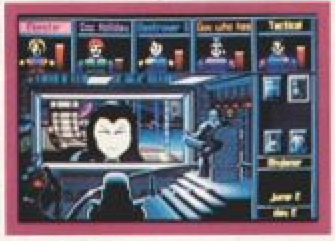
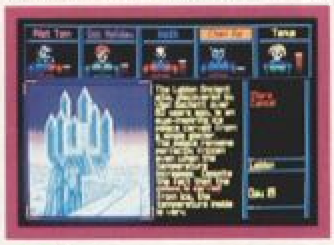
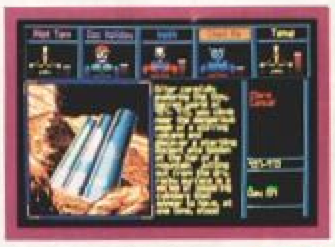






MEGATRAVELLER 2

QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

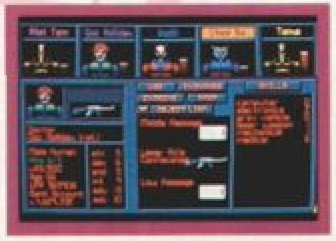
The game features the most advanced and comprehensive character generation system ever developed as well as the most intuitive combat system for ground and space conflicts. The overhead perspective is equally unique, showing your entire party from a perspective that realistically represents a large, modern city.

Megatraveller 2 features a much more graphic-intensive presentation than Megatraveller 1. An enhanced trade and commerce system is implemented in Megatraveller 2. The new economic system is much more realistic and benefits from the substantial increase in worlds.

Megatraveller 2 uses the PAL system: you are the leader of the party, and the others act as your friends. You can give orders, but acting intelligently based on the skills and the characteristics they possess, they may not follow your instructions if they believe that different actions on their parts will ultimately help you in a more effective way.

There are hundreds of NPC's to meet; converse and trade with during your adventure.

Overall, Megatraveller 2: Quest for the Ancients is an all new game with exciting advanced features. The sheer size and scope of the game with over 127 different worlds to explore will keep you playing time and time again. This together with the superb graphics and animated sequences and the revolutionary PAL role-playing system, make for the most exciting adventure yet seen on a Home Computer.



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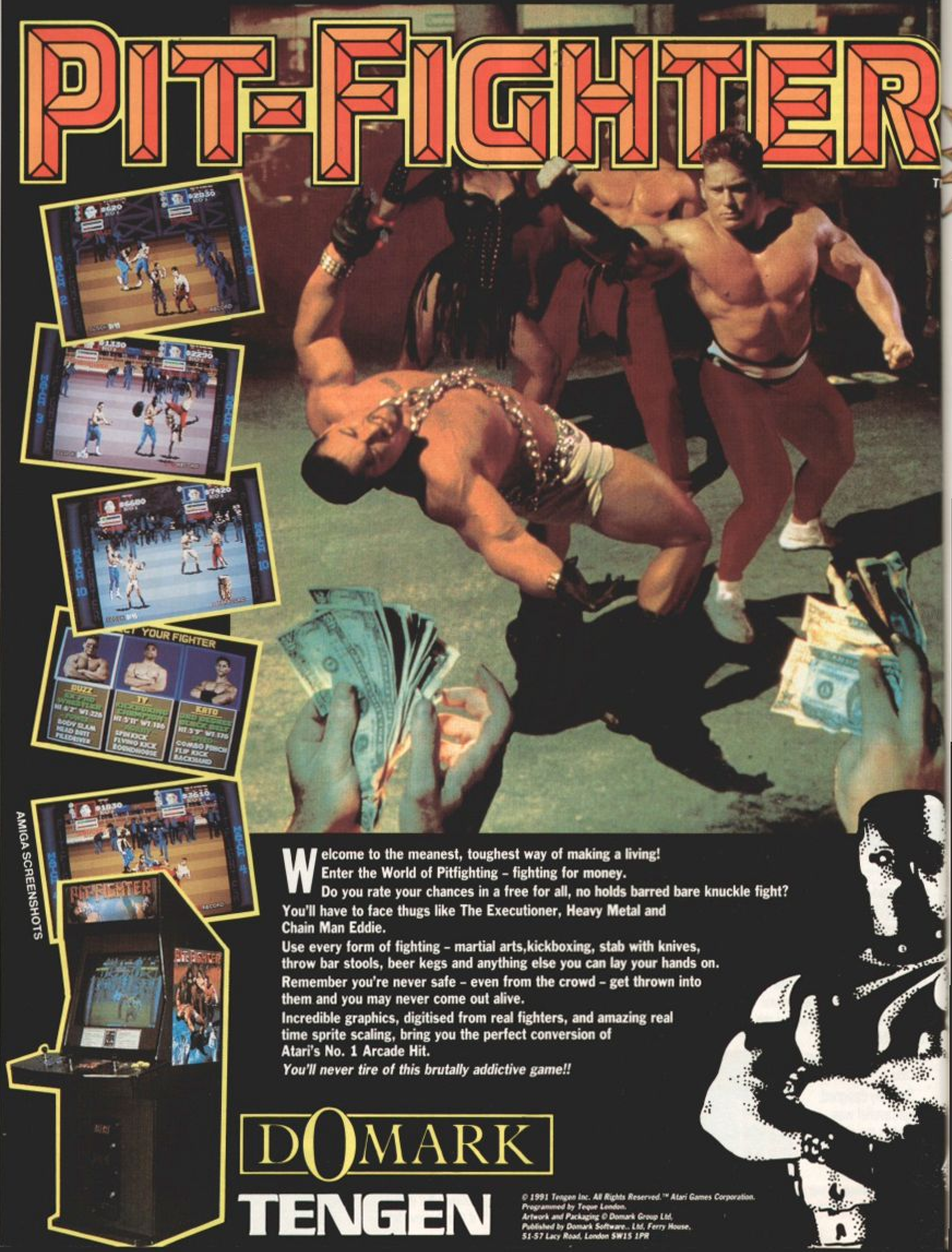
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Have you got what it takes to make it to No.1 this Christmas?

CHOOSE YOUR OWN CHARACTER

WARDY (from out of Ocean) - He does the Movies!
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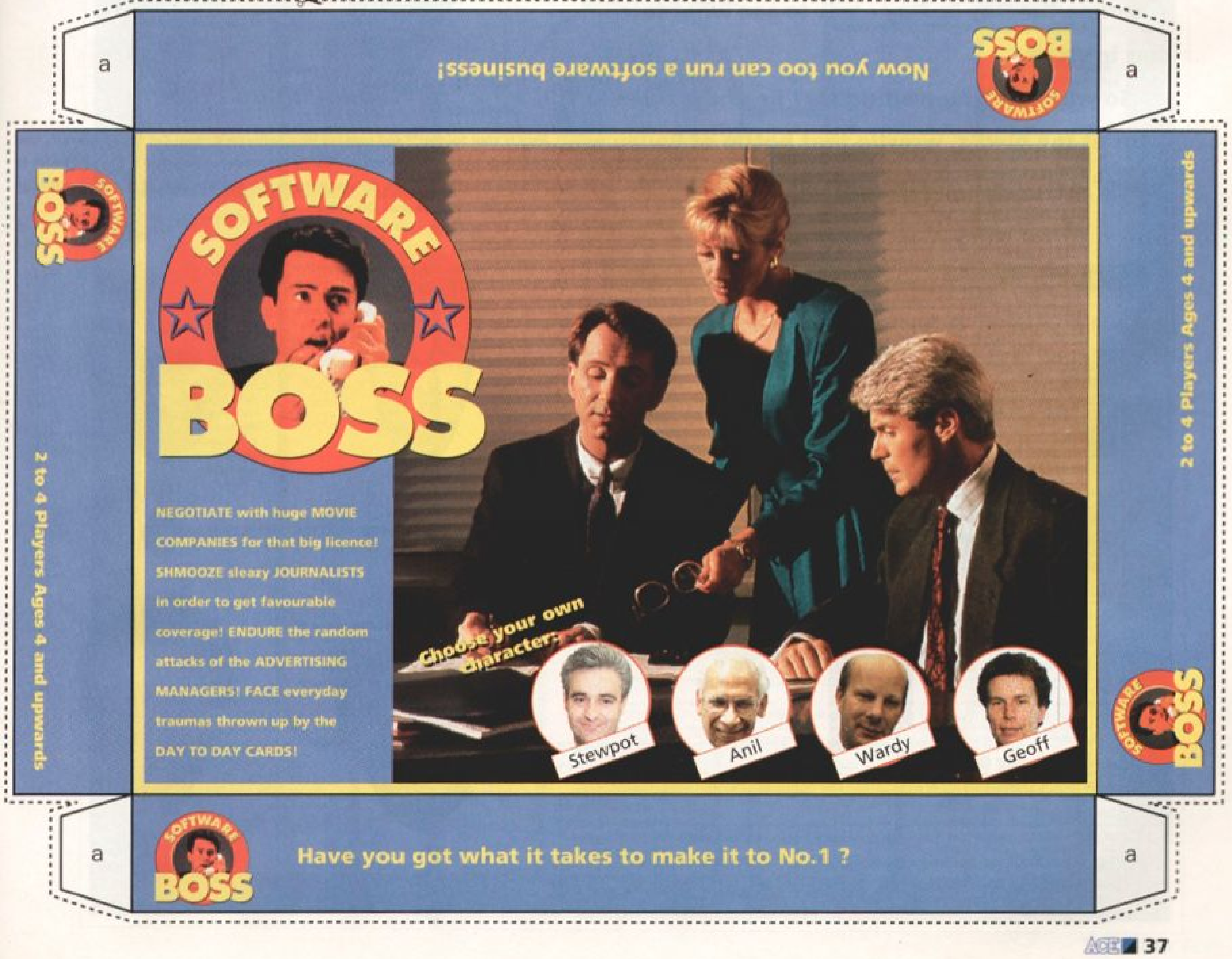
STEWPOT (out of Gremlin) - He does the Driving Games!
ANIL (of Anco fame) - He does all the Footy Games!


NEGOTIATE with huge MOVIE COMPANIES for that big licence! SHMOOZE sleazy JOURNALISTS in order to get favourable coverage! ENDURE the random attacks of the ADVERTISING MANAGERS! FACE everyday traumas thrown up by the DAY TO DAY CARDS!

a
Now you too can run a software business!
SOFTWARE BOSS
a
SOFTWARE BOSS
2 to 4 Players Ages 4 and upwards
SOFTWARE BOSS
Choose your own character:
Stewpot
Anil
Wardy
Geoff
2 to 4 Players Ages 4 and upwards
SOFTWARE BOSS
a
SOFTWARE BOSS
Have you got what it takes to make it to No.1 ?
a

Welcome to Software Boss! Far more than a harmless bit of fun to enjoy after Christmas lunch, this is actually an accurate simulation of what it's really like to run a software firm. But don't be put off if that sounds a bit complicated - believe us, it's a bloody doddle!

The aim of the game is to get a Christmas Number One, thus ensuring the financial stability of your company and a nice holiday and perhaps a new car for yourself. But the path to success is anything but clear. Every stage of the development of your Game has to be handled correctly, or you could be looking at some bad reviews and a luke-warm public reception. You also have to examine the Day to Day cards to see what fate has in store.

So what are you waiting for? Read the rules, cut out the pieces, wrestle that bottle of Bailey's out of Aunty Mo's hand and get going!

THE DAY TO DAY TABLE

Spin the Spinner™ twice and add the scores. Examine the table below to see what Lady Luck has in store for you over the next working day!

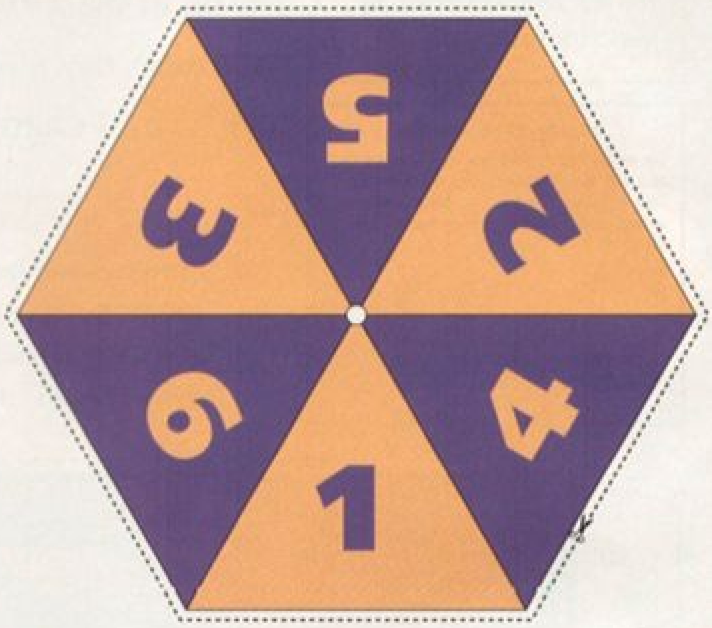
2	One of your opponents has a power cut and loses all his accounts data! Move him back 10 places!
3	One of your opponents hasn't paid his advertising bills. Move him back 6 places!
4	One of your opponents has to endure a presentation from an Advertising Manager. He loses half a day's work. Move him back 4 spaces!
5	Hooray! Trade paper CTW writes a nice story about you. Move forward 4 spaces.
6	Spanish distributors like the sound of your new game. Move forward 2 spaces.
7	Nothing unusual happens today.
8	Another quiet day.
9	You have to go to a show in Poland. Go back 4 spaces.
10	Ugly rumours about your extra-curricular activities on the last Computer Arena Conference leak out. Go back 4 spaces.
11	Who hasn't booked an ad in ACE lately? The public forgets you exist. Go back 8 spaces.
12	40,000 copies of your last game get sent back because they won't load. Serves you right for choosing a cheap duplicator. You lose a fortune! Go back 10 spaces.

Rules:

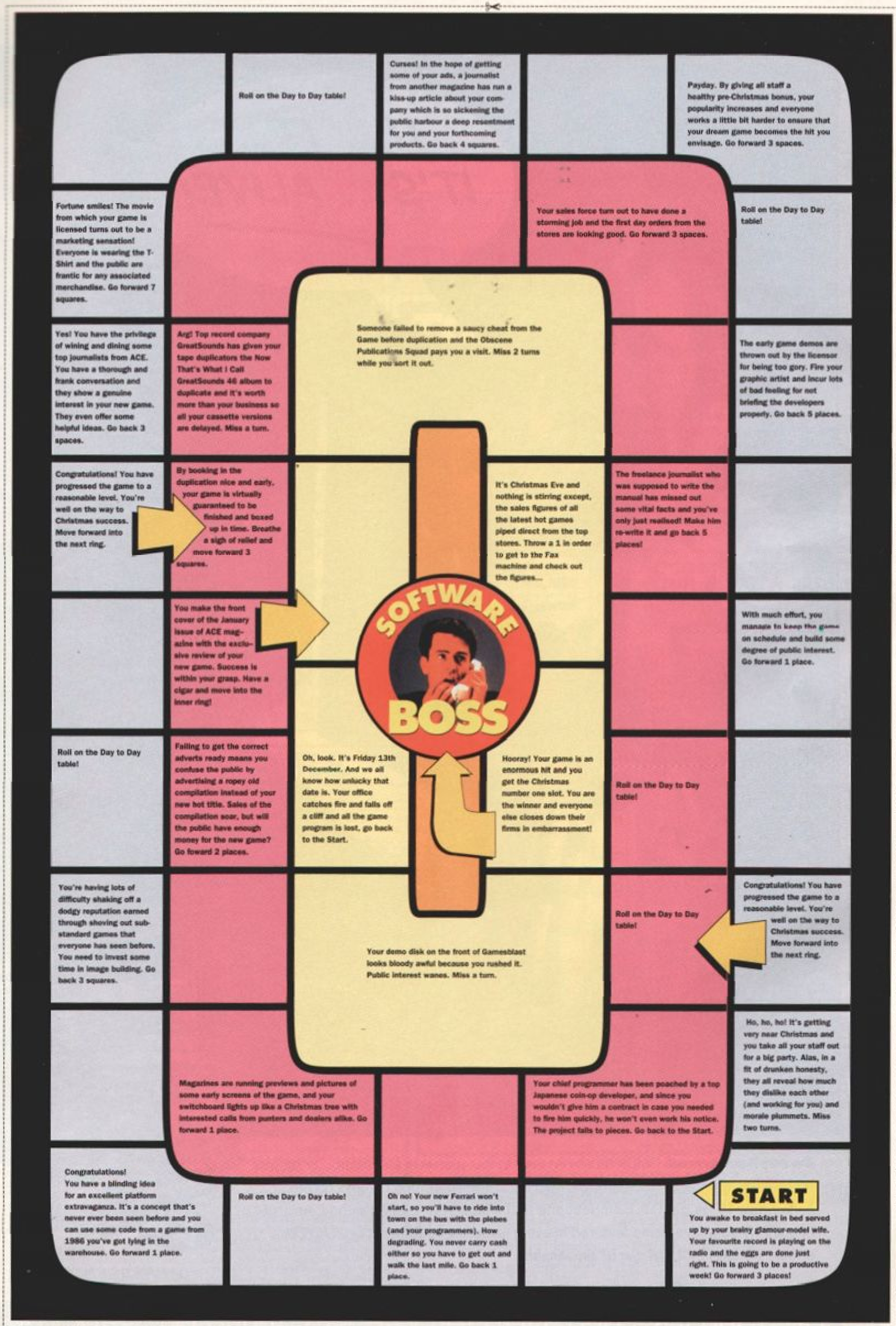
Each player must choose a Character, either Wardy, Geoff, Stewpot or Anil. All players start on the Start square and whoever gets the highest single roll of the die goes first.

The player spins the Spinner™ and moves the according number of places clockwise around the board. The board is split up into three "rings", each representing a different stage in the development and marketing of the Game. Only by landing directly on a Progress square can a player move onto the next "ring". If they overshoot, they have to keep going around the board. Whenever the player lands on an Action square, he must follow whatever instructions he finds on the square. Players landing on a Day to Day square can spin against the Day to Day table. Here, the player must face the little every day joys and woes meated out by our friend Fate.

A player's turn ends when he lands on a blank square or when he has finished spinning on the Day to Day table. Once on the Christmas Eve square, the player must spin a 1 to move into the Winner's square. He if he fails to get a 1, he must wait until his turn comes round and throw again.



Here is your Spinner™ and here are your Software Bosses! Cut the Bosses out , fold over their ties and stick each on a penny. (Pennies not included) If you don't wish to ruin the front of the box, we suggest you buy another copy of the issue, although we wouldn't wish to push the point.



Roll on the Day to Day table!

Curses! In the hope of getting some of your ads, a journalist from another magazine has run a kiss-up article about your company which is so sickening the public harbour a deep resentment for you and your forthcoming products. Go back 4 squares.

Payday. By giving all staff a healthy pre-Christmas bonus, your popularity increases and everyone works a little bit harder to ensure that your dream game becomes the hit you envisage. Go forward 3 spaces.

Fortune smiles! The movie from which your game is licensed turns out to be a marketing sensation! Everyone is wearing the T-Shirt and the public are frantic for any associated merchandise. Go forward 7 squares.

Your sales force turn out to have done a storming job and the first day orders from the stores are looking good. Go forward 3 spaces.

Roll on the Day to Day table!

Yes! You have the privilege of wining and dining some top journalists from ACE. You have a thorough and frank conversation and they show a genuine interest in your new game. They even offer some helpful ideas. Go back 3 spaces.

Arg! Top record company GreatSounds has given your tape duplicators the Now That's What I Call GreatSounds 46 album to duplicate and it's worth more than your business so all your cassette versions are delayed. Miss a turn.

Someone failed to remove a saucy cheat from the Game before duplication and the Obscene Publications Squad pays you a visit. Miss 2 turns while you sort it out.

The early game demos are thrown out by the licensor for being too gory. Fire your graphic artist and incur lots of bad feeling for not briefing the developers properly. Go back 5 places.

Congratulations! You have progressed the game to a reasonable level. You're well on the way to Christmas success. Move forward into the next ring.

By booking in the duplication nice and early, your game is virtually guaranteed to be finished and boxed up in time. Breathe a sigh of relief and move forward 3 squares.

It's Christmas Eve and nothing is stirring except, the sales figures of all the latest hot games piped direct from the top stores. Throw a 1 in order to get to the *Fax* machine and check out the figures...

The freelance journalist who was supposed to write the manual has missed out some vital facts and you've only just realised! Make him re-write it and go back 5 places!

You make the front cover of the January issue of ACE magazine with the exclusive review of your new game. Success is within your grasp. Have a cigar and move into the inner ring!

With much effort, you manage to keep the game on schedule and build some degree of public interest. Go forward 1 place.

Roll on the Day to Day table!

Failing to get the correct adverts ready means you confuse the public by advertising a ropey old compilation instead of your new hot title. Sales of the compilation soar, but will the public have enough money for the new game? Go foward 2 places.

Oh, look. It's Friday 13th December. And we all know how unlucky that date is. Your office catches fire and falls off a cliff and all the game program is lost, go back to the Start.

Hooray! Your game is an enormous hit and you get the Christmas number one slot. You are the winner and everyone else closes down their firms in embarrassment!

Roll on the Day to Day table!

You're having lots of difficulty shaking off a dodgy reputation earned through shoving out sub-standard games that everyone has seen before. You need to invest some time in image building. Go back 3 squares.

Roll on the Day to Day table!

Congratulations! You have progressed the game to a reasonable level. You're well on the way to Christmas success. Move forward into the next ring.

Your demo disk on the front of Gamesblast looks bloody awful because you rushed it. Public interest wanes. Miss a turn.

Magazines are running previews and pictures of some early screens of the game, and your switchboard lights up like a Christmas tree with interested calls from punters and dealers alike. Go forward 1 place.

Your chief programmer has been poached by a top Japanese coin-op developer, and since you wouldn't give him a contract in case you needed to fire him quickly, he won't even work his notice. The project falls to pieces. Go back to the Start.

Ho, ho, ho! It's getting very near Christmas and you take all your staff out for a big party. Alas, in a fit of drunken honesty, they all reveal how much they dislike each other (and working for you) and morale plummets. Miss two turns.

Congratulations!
You have a blinding idea for an excellent platform extravaganza. It's a concept that's never ever been seen before and you can use some code from a game from 1986 you've got lying in the warehouse. Go forward 1 place.

Roll on the Day to Day table!

Oh no! Your new Ferrari won't start, so you'll have to ride into town on the bus with the plebes (and your programmers). How degrading. You never carry cash either so you have to get out and walk the last mile. Go back 1 place.

START

You awake to breakfast in bed served up by your brainy glamour-model wife. Your favourite record is playing on the radio and the eggs are done just right. This is going to be a productive week! Go forward 3 places!

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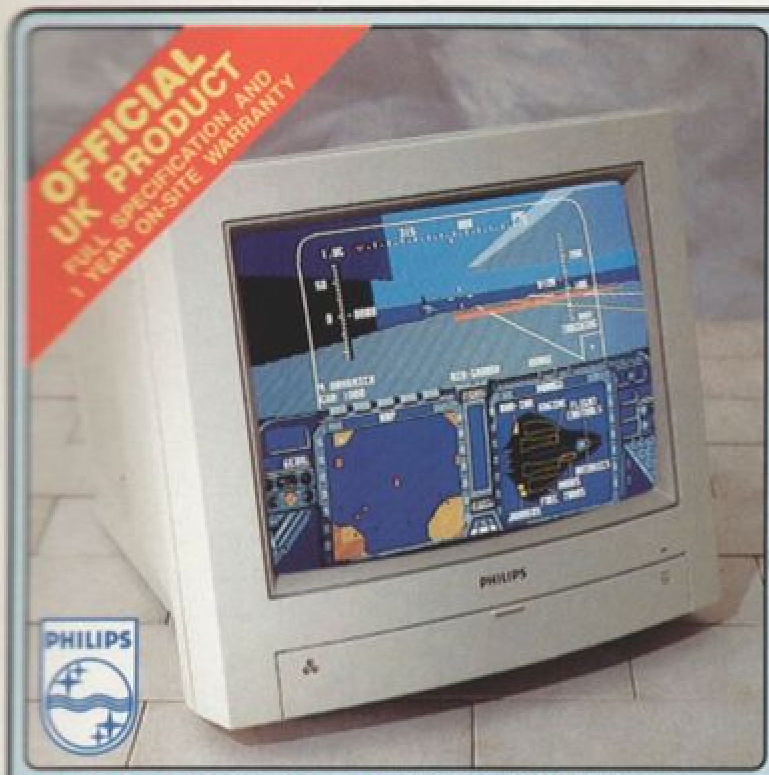

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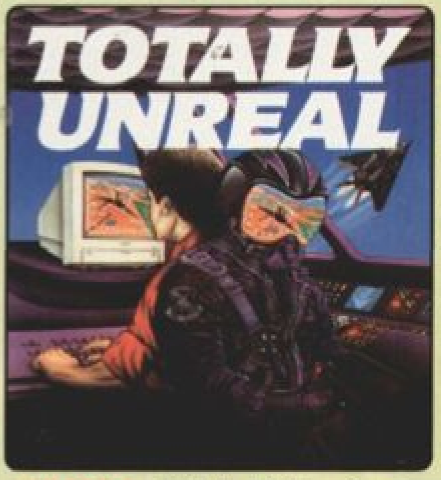

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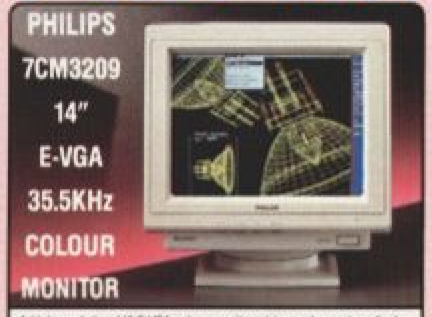

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A320
A·I·R·B·U·S

...is on final approach.

Garry Whitta's previews....

Ho Ho Ho! And a hearty welcome to one and all to this very special Christmas bumper bundle of Previews. And ooh, isn't it exciting? The presents, the stuffing, the poncy Woolworths ads... you can just taste the Chrimble season in the air. If only people wouldn't keep dragging religion into it...

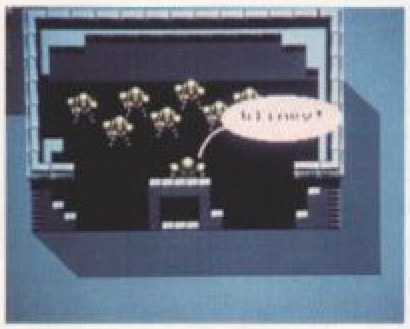
Now, to business. And although the games on offer this month are a bit late to find their way into Santa's sack, no doubt they'll be earning pride of place in the Easter Bunny's stocking, or whatever it is he keeps his eggs in. There's a juicy crop on show, including a few rather tasty exclusives, complete with never-before-seen screenshots and, ooh, lots of other great stuff besides. Am I good to you or what?

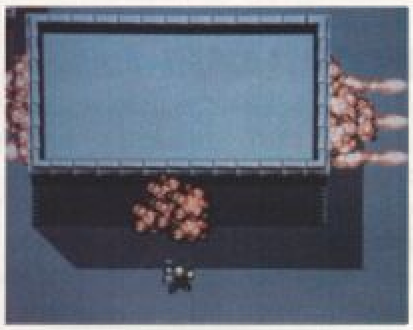
BODYCOUNT *Strangeways*

Though last month's Smash TV boasted some very excellent wholesale destruction, fledgling development team Strangeways (the team behind Apocalypse - see page 31) is promising to blow it away in the violence stakes with a tasty little number by the name of Bodycount. Like Smash, Bodycount is based around a futuristic TV game show, where contestants vie to stay alive by killing everything else in the vicinity.

There's a lot more to it here, however, as the players are given a variety of military-style missions to complete, all set within a gargantuan multi-way scrolling games arena known as the Bodydrome. Within the maze-like kill-zone, contestants must seek out objectives while avoiding all manner of enemy patrols and alarm systems that constantly protect the area.

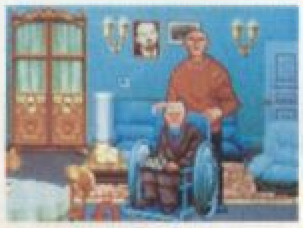
There's an awesome array of weaponry available, including pistols, rifles, automatic weapons, grenades, bombs and rocket-launchers. EVERYTHING within the Bodydrome is fair game: entire buildings can be blown up, booby-traps can be set up for enemy troops to stumble into - there's no limit to the range of dirty tricks available. Though Bodycount is still in the early stages of development, the word is that a publisher is already on the brink of snapping it up, so with a bit of luck we should see something towards mid-to-late next year.

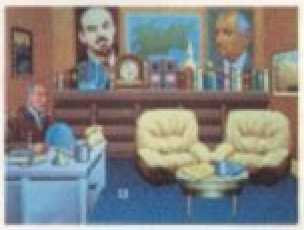




KGB *Virgin Games*

After the excellent Floor 13, Virgin Games is delving even further into the murky world of political intrigue and corruption with KGB. Based around the USSR's infamous secret intelligence agency, it puts the player in the shoes of a young agent who must advance himself through the ranks of the tortuous organisation. It's played like a graphic adventure (point and click à la Lucasfilm), with strategy elements built in. Character interaction plays an important part as the player struts his stuff both around the corridors of the KGB's building and in the surrounding city.

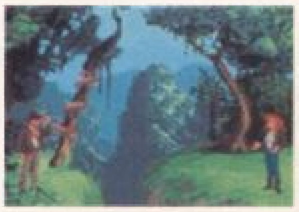


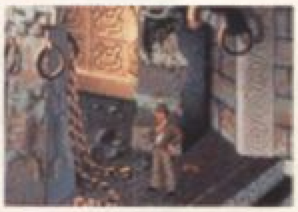


And though the KGB isn't exactly famed for its above-board techniques, because the game's based on a real agency as opposed to the fictional one in Floor 13, it's unlikely there will be any of those unsavoury torture sequences. As the screenshots show, that VGA card has been pushed to provide some very tasty and 'clean' visuals, and the whole thing is icon-controlled for ease of use. All would-be komrades can get cracking on the PC in the new year, with 16-bit versions following later. Da?

INDIANA JONES AND THE FATE OF ATLANTIS *US Gold/Lucasfilm*

Though we may have seen the last of the intrepid archaeologist at the cinema, Lucasfilm Games has ensured that his whip-cracking, antiquity-grabbing adventures are far from over. The same team that produced last year's excellent Last Crusade adaptation have had a tougher job than most with this, the fourth chronicle of Doctor Indiana Jones' adventures - because it's a totally original product, there's been no film material to work from and so the whole story has been scripted from scratch.





The result, however, is every bit as action-packed as any of Indy's big-screen escapades, with the man in the hat searching for the fabled sunken continent of Atlantis - with a tasty bird in tow and all kinds of cackling bad guys waiting

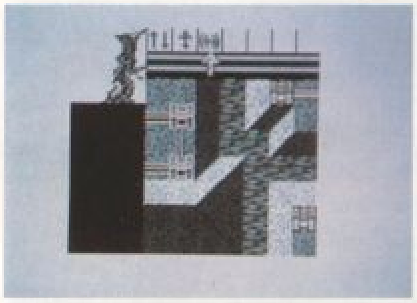
44▶

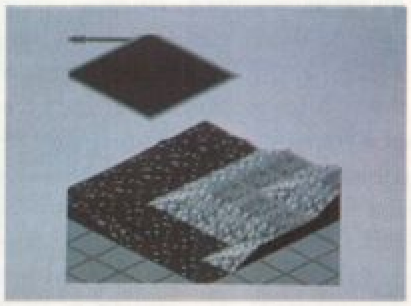
Garry Whitta's previews...

43▶ in the wings, of course. Lucasfilm's ultra-friendly SCUMM™ system has been improved yet again, now boasting even more sophisticated character interaction, and the VGA graphics are right smart to say the least. The PC version is due out early next year, with ST and Amiga following a few months after.

POPULOUS *Bullfrog*

It has to be the software success story of the century. From its humble 16-bit origins, Bullfrog's classic strategy epic (the sequel to which is reviewed on page 62) has gone on to be converted to just about every computer and console format conceivable - the Super Famicom version alone has sold over 400,000 copies! Handhelds are the next logical step, and though no official deal has yet been signed, it's looking more likely with every passing day. Bullfrog are so confident that they've already put a fair amount of thought into what such an incarnation would be like - what you're seeing here are their mock-up graphical renderings of the proposed GameBoy version.



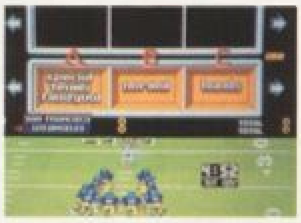


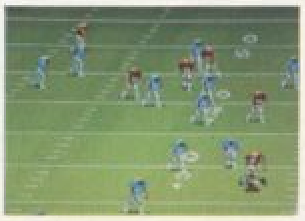
Two very different display modes are being mooted at the moment. On the right is the traditional 3D perspective, complete with map and icons - which is feared may be a little too taxing for the little machine's graphical capabilities. As an alternative, Bullfrog have come up with this 2D bird's-eye view on the left which, while more functional, is less faithful to the original game. It's still undecided what the final game will look like, but hey, who knows, you may end up getting a choice of either viewpoint! Needless to say there's vast potential for two-player link-up games, too. Don't expect to see anything concrete for quite a while, but you can rest assured we'll keep you posted in the meantime.

JOHN MADDEN'S FOOTBALL

Electronic Arts

Before EA Hockey came along, John Madden's Football enjoyed a very long spell of being the best sports game on the Megadrive. John is apparently a bit of a top quarterback back in the States, and had no qualms about lending his name to this, because it wiped the floor with every other footy game going at the time. Now it's on its way to the Amiga, and though it's likely to come up against much stiffer competition on this format (mainly in the guise of the excellent TV Sports: Football), its sophisticated playcalling combined with super-instinctive control of players on the gridiron and lots of other excellent stuff besides means that this could well topple Cinemaware's classic.

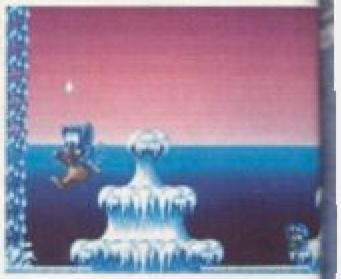


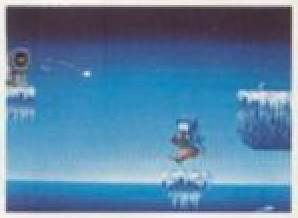


The only stumbling block is the conversion process itself - this is the first time an original Megadrive game has been adapted for computer, so it's touch and go to say the least. All the lights are green so far, however, and John touches down in the early part of the new year.

FIRE AND ICE *Image Works*

Yes, Mirrorsoft has acquired the official Torvill and Dean licence! Actually, that's not quite true, and any similarities between the has-been ice-skater's Christmas TV special and Andrew Braybrook's up-and-coming platform game are purely coincidental. Fire and Ice represents a welcome return to platforms for Andrew, who hasn't visited the genre since the C64 classic Gribbly's Day Out in 1984. Once again, cute is the key word with the player taking control of a big wide-eyed wolf who must protect some wolf pups from a band of horrible fire demons who threaten to melt the entire frozen kingdom. Boo!



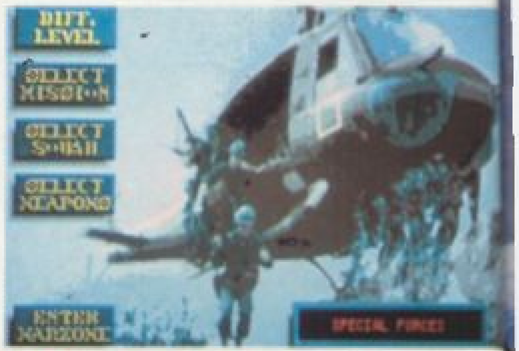


Fortunately Mr Wolf, who was born in the frozen wastelands, can use ice as a weapon against his foes and as a tool (chelt!) to help navigate the landscape. It's certainly very pretty, though how it stands up in today's competitive platform market remains to be seen. But with Andrew's outstanding credentials (Rainbow Islands and Paradroid 90 among them), chances are the end product will be something a bit special. Ironically, you'll have to wait until the Spring, by which time any icy weather will have long since melted away, to find out.

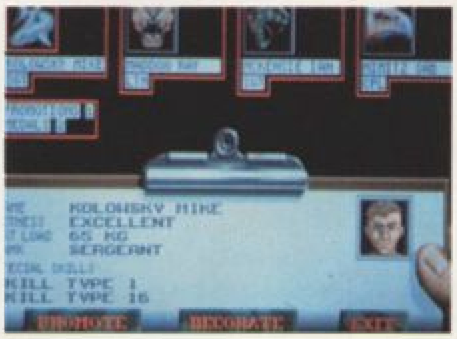
SPECIAL FORCES *Microprose*

Yet more military fun from MicroProse - although this time the player doesn't have the advantage of being encased in two hundred tons of armour plate and having heat-seeking missiles available at the touch of a button. Special Forces is an 'arcade simulation' in the style of 'Prose's aging favourite Airborne Ranger, based around the exploits of an elite army infantry unit with orders to stamp out bad guys wherever they may be found.

The player takes command of the four-man team, leading them through 16 missions set around the world - targets include drug barons, terrorist factions and illegal military juntas. In each mission, the team is dropped in by helicopter, and then must struggle through all kinds of adverse terrain (including arctic and desert conditions), avoiding enemy patrols and traps, to reach its objective, then return safely for the next.



Unlike the earlier Airborne Ranger, which featured only a single character, Special Forces has more strategic scope, allowing the player to split his team into smaller independent groups and put together intricately-planned assaults. In true Microprose style, each team member progresses as the game goes on, accumulating points and promotions, and the missions are linked, with the team's performance in one relating directly to the next. Special Forces is out in the New Year, so start smearing your face with animal droppings.



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SPORTS 4D

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ERO HERO 90%

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"Seconds out...Round One! The crowd
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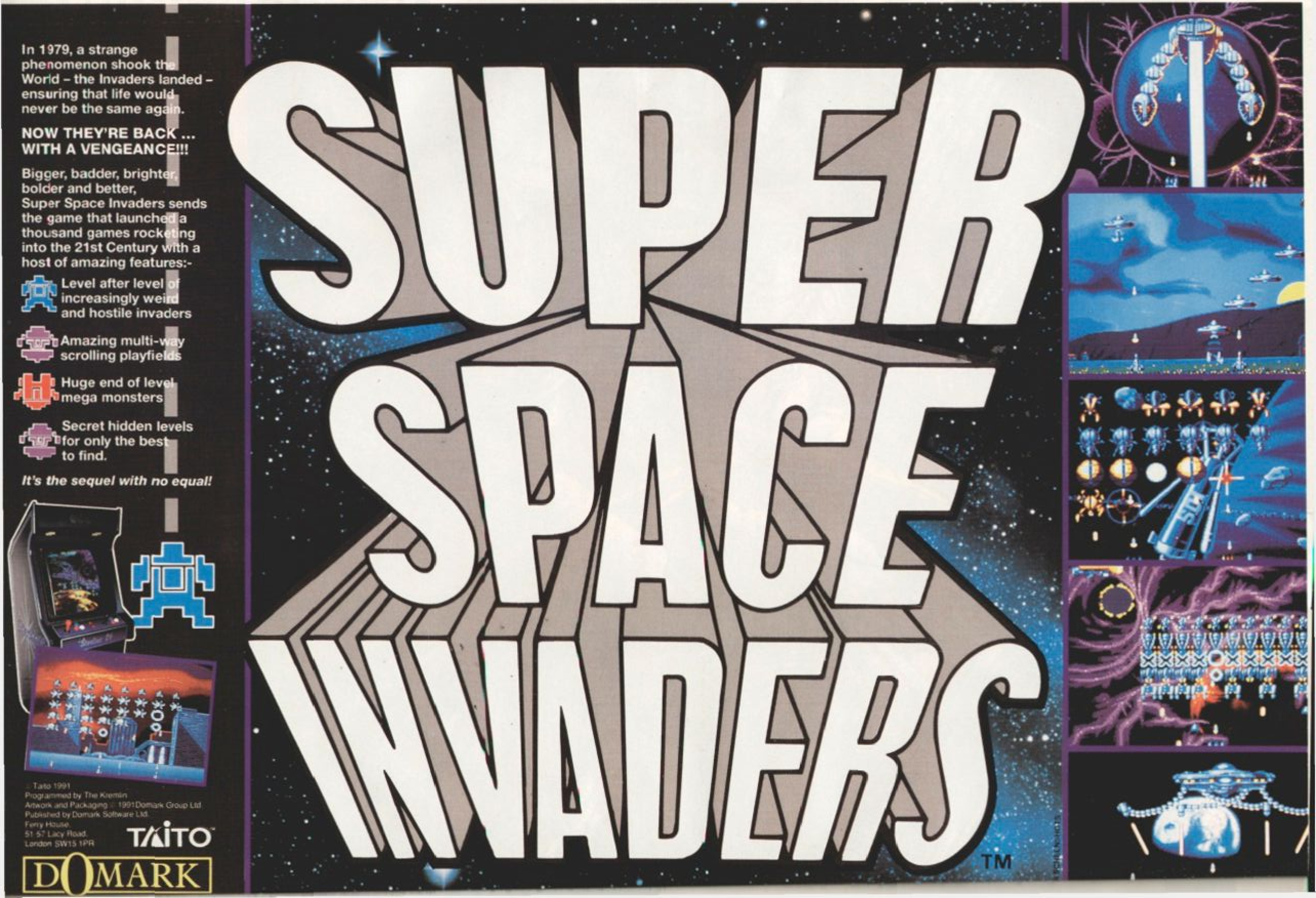

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TAITO

DOMARK

SCREENTEST

Welcome! Welcome one and all to a thoroughly awesome reading experience. You are about to enter the ACE Screentest section, the most detailed and trustworthy reviewing system in the universe!

Every word of the review is intended to help *you* decide whether the game is for you or not. The body text is combined with a plethora of handy icons to offer at-a-glance information.

Each game is compared and contrasted to another title as an easy frame of reference. Most commonly, it will be compared to the best its particular genre.

The Thumbs up and Down box details particular elements which may or may not appeal - the toughness of the bad guys, number of levels, long-term appeal etc.

The ACE Rating – a score out of 1,000 – is the most instant gauge of the quality of the game.

An ACE Trailblazer award goes to games scoring over 900. These are recommended without hesitation. They are "must buys".

Titles which excel in a particular area also stand the chance of being awarded a Sound, Graphics or Idea award (for innovation).

There's even beginners' hints to get you through the early stages should you buy the game that month and can't wait for our detailed tips the following issue.

Finally, the PIC curve details our feelings as to the longevity of the game.

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900 AMIGA RATING			
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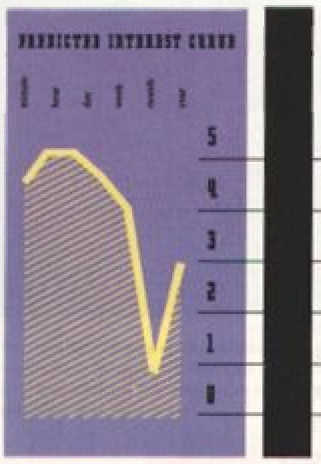
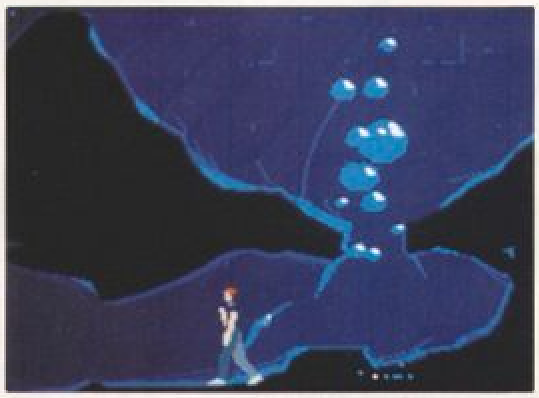


Genre Arcade Adventure
Publisher US Gold
Developer Delphine
Price £29.99

ANOTHER WORLD

You've played Norse warriors and rebel space pilots. You've played swashbuckling pirates and famous military commanders. And now, thanks to Delphine, you get to play a spindly copper-topped boffin called Lester. Terrific. Mind you, while the prospect of a billion screaming Mario-philes beating down the doors of software stores across the nation in order to adopt the persona of Lester is unlikely, this Everyman approach at least offers some novelty. Playing superheroes and monsters has now become so normal, assuming the role of a regular human helps the player feel even more at sea in his new environment. A normal guy in a crazy situation and all that.



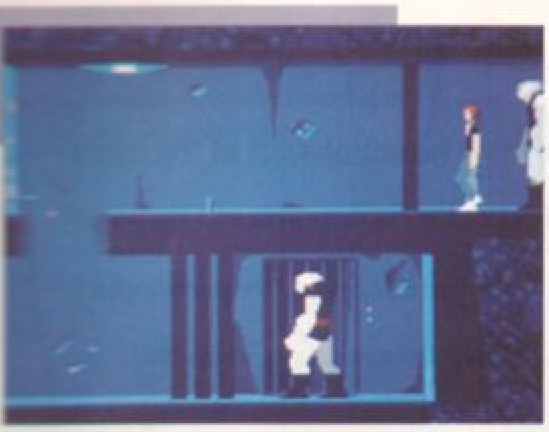
Oops. In a fantastically unwise move, Lester has destroyed a thin piece of rock with his blaster pistol, initiating a non-relaxing million-tonnes-of-water situation. Say "Goodbye", Lester.

Watching the admirably cinematic opening sequence, the player learns how Lester finds himself in the mysterious new environment of the title. Lester is a brilliant nuclear scientist and a bit of a Doogie Howser in the age stakes if his boyish appearance (complete with T-shirt, jeans and trainers) is anything to go by. Working late on his latest mind-boggling experiment, Lester plans to perform a dangerous but potentially revolutionary experiment of the particle-physics variety.

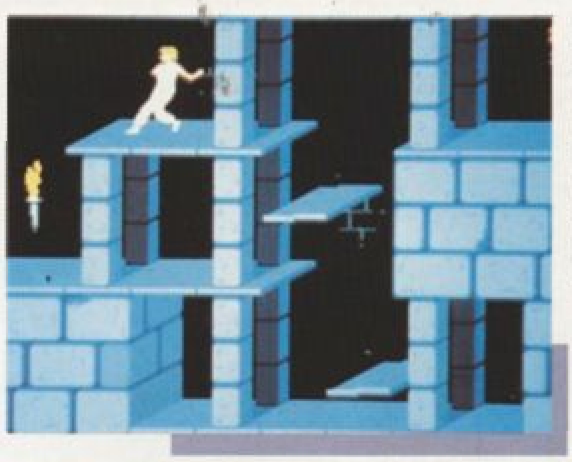
At a particularly critical point during this particle-meddling, lightning strikes Lester's laboratory, surges back through the complex electronic equipment and into the very console where our carrot-topped scientist works. In a blinding flash of light Lester is vanished away to a new mysterious land. Armed with only his Gallic shrug and a girl's-blouse academic background, Lester must explore his new environment and discover a way to get back home.

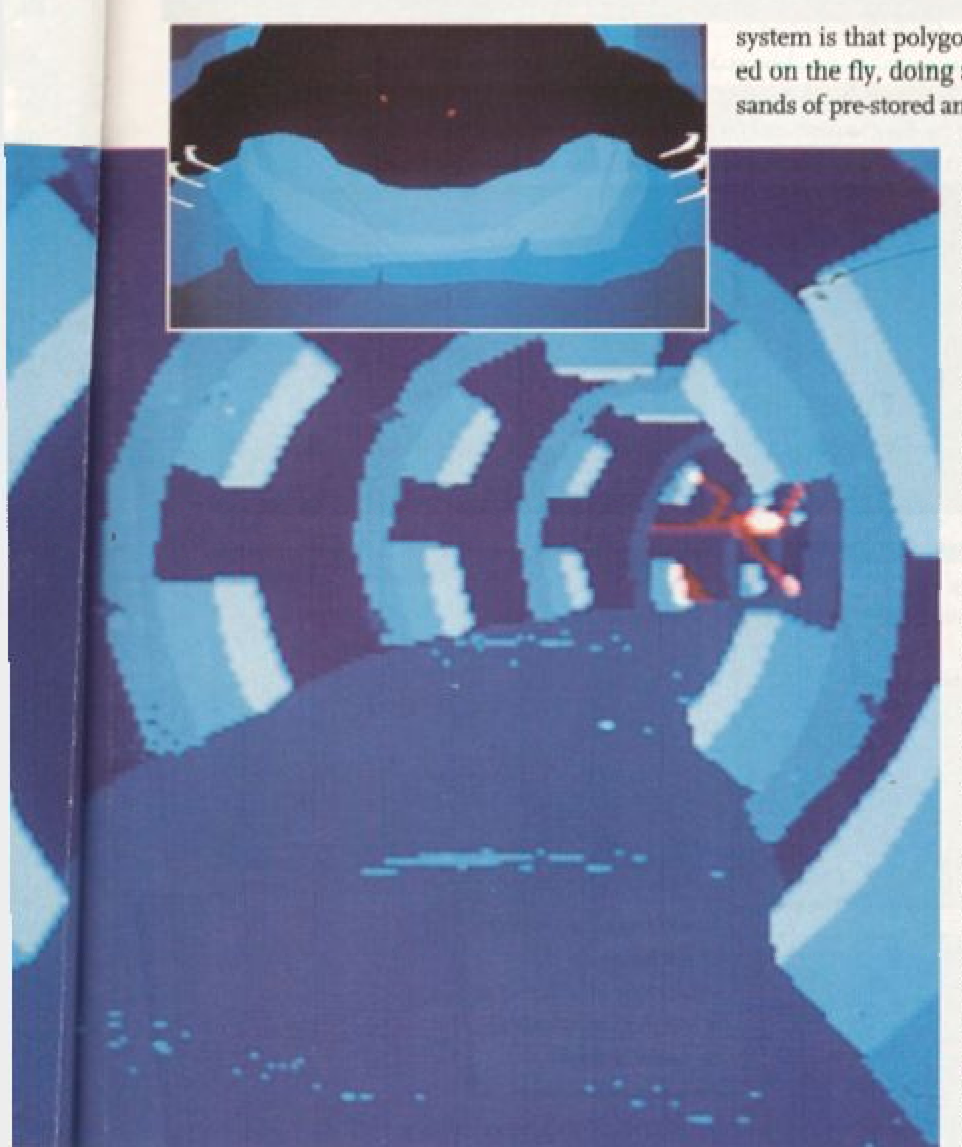
The 'deal' with Another World is that Delphine have taken a similar graphics system used to such great effect in their previous release *Future Wars* and have stripped away the mouse-driven adventure replacing it with a more instant, joystick-controlled interface. And on a number of counts it's a big success. But I have my reservations.

In what can only be described as a very brave move, Delphine have endeavoured to conjure up an interactive and believable movie using the world's least atmospheric graphic tool: the polygon. The result is that Another World's graphic style is distinctly, well, French. Whatever you may think of the end result, it's at least a completely new approach for an arcade adventure, which can't be all bad. A big plus for this



Despite the fact that Another World is, to an extent, quite an original game, there are plenty of points of comparison. The most immediate is Prince of Persia from Broderbund (through Domark), since the central character animates in a similar fashion and the thrill of the game is supposed to surround the player's belief that they are controlling a real person. PoP wins outright on this count, having both quicker and more attractive animation, but Another World has a host of extras which are noticably absent from Broderbund's game. In particular, the overall "feel" is of a more believable, albeit peculiar game world. Another World also boasts more variety through its levels, some requiring mapping and planning, others making demands on the player's arcade skills. For an all-round new experience, Another World wins, but no-one has yet surpassed the graphic excellence of the Prince.





Fine examples of the graphic style peculiar to Another World. The lightning bolt hurtles down the pipes in Lester's lab during the intro sequence, and the enormous black monster prepares to devour the player in an early death sequence. Most impressive.

system is that polygon animations can be calculated on the fly, doing away with the need for thousands of pre-stored animation frames. This basically means that the design team have had more room to develop the story and atmosphere of the product with extra cutaway scenes, sound effects, etc. (See the 'Play the Film' panel).

There's no question, however, that the seriously stylised nature of the graphics will be an instant turn off for some players. It's a shame, because despite their initially inhuman appearance, they really capture the feel of both a strange world and its inhabitants surprisingly effectively.

Since the player is equipped with a pretty basic model Lester to begin with - no blaster rifle, no grenades, no teleport equipment - he's given the chance to get to grips with the 'smart' control method. Smart controls basically mean that Lester will not necessarily perform the same action every time the player moves the joystick in a particular way. Depending on his environment, Lester may be able to do things differently. If a vine hangs overhead, Lester may well be able to jump and catch it. If there's an object at his feet, he'll bend down to pick it up.

It would have been far easier for the programmers to have Lester performing a basic Jump animation every time the joystick went Up or the same Object Search every time the player bent down, but they didn't. Instead, an individual animation sequence is triggered for each special situation. The downside of the smart-control setup is that occasionally the player will be presented with a problem and he'll face a nagging doubt that he should cycle through all the normal controls simply to see if one has a new effect in that particular puzzle location.

Now hang on a second. Cartoony graphics? Plenty of animation? Some doubts over the puzzles and controls? This all sounds a bit *Dragon's Lair*, does it not? Mais non, ma petite pomme de terre. The player has continual control over Lester, which simply expands to offer some new options in certain circumstances. Another World is also distinct from the much-criticised laserdisk outing in its refreshing lack of no-chance death situations. Even in the most perilous parts of the story, there will be a warning of impending doom. Paying careful attention to these hints and using a bit of common sense (don't jump off into holes you can't see, don't stand around like a big ninny in hostile areas) will keep unexpected death to a minimum.

For a game with no guiding text and such a wide brief for the player - get back home, somehow - Another World does a fine job of guiding the gamer through its numerous stages, largely by keeping him contained in a small number of locations. Once he emerges in his new world, the player finds himself in a suite of five screens, each representing a different part of a mysterious alien plateau. Left of the start screen would seem to be a bit of a dead end, with only a vine hanging down. Grabbing the vine simply swings the player back to the start screen.

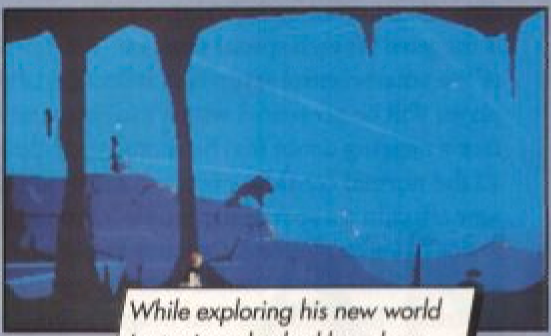
Playing superheroes has now become so normal, assuming the role of a regular human helps the player feel even more at sea in his new environment.

The screens on the right are populated by deadly black squid-like things which slow Lester down until he's kicked them away. Once Lester gets to the far right of the screens, however, his progress is blocked by an enormous and quite genuinely alarming monster. Lester only has a couple of seconds to flee the big monster, removing any question of him having to perform an elaborate self-defence move. Instead Lester must run and run back through the screens (coming sadly a cropper if he failed to dispatch all the black blobs on the way) with the monster thundering after him.

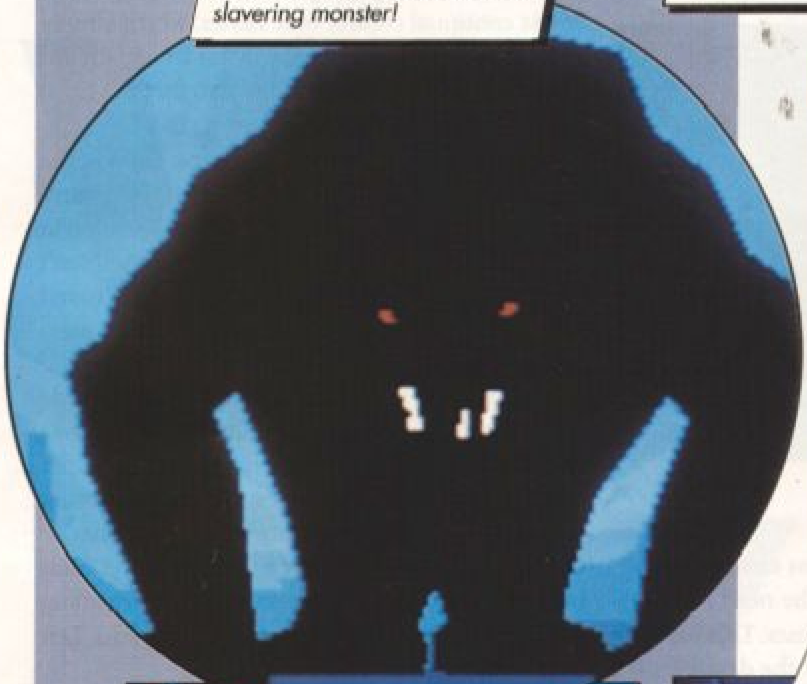
On reaching the final screen, there's simply nothing left for Lester except to leap and hope. Of course, this is exactly what he's supposed to do and swinging back off the vine will land him one screen to the right. Even here, he must run hell for leather to avoid the monster who's still chasing him. As Lester runs back across the screens the monster gains ground again until he's right on top of Lester and the player realises that he isn't going to escape. It's only on the final screen that a mysteriously cloaked figure

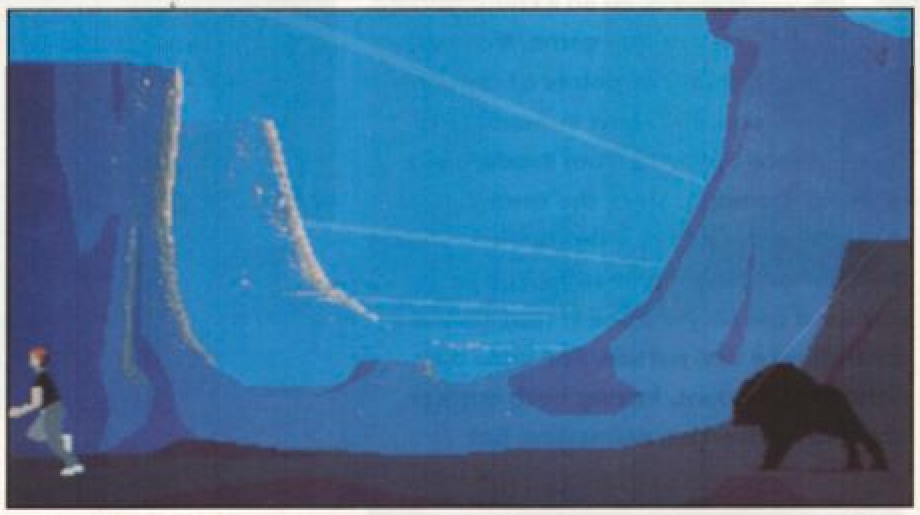
▶ 54

Another World's visual style is reminiscent of the more interesting French comics, with Lester haring around through the weird and wonderful alien landscapes. In particular, the set pieces make for especially interesting viewing.

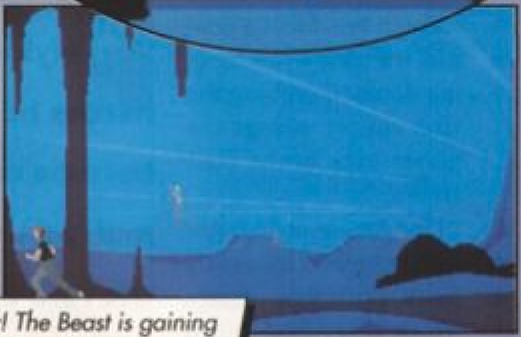


While exploring his new world Lester is ambushed by a huge, slavering monster!

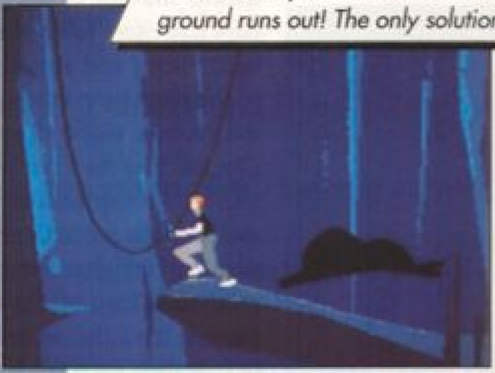


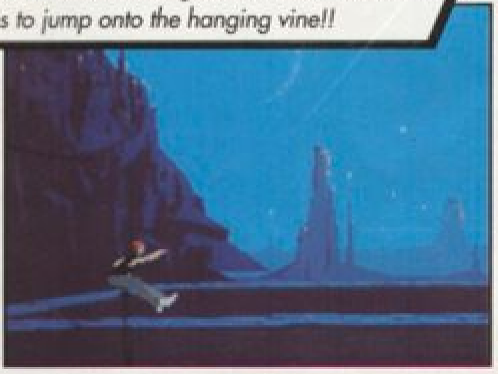


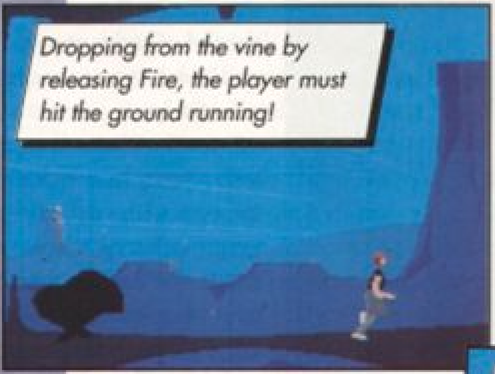
His fingers aching through holding his joystick Left as far as it would go, Lester is hounded by the monster until he reaches the left edge of the level, where the ground runs out! The only solution is to jump onto the hanging vine!!



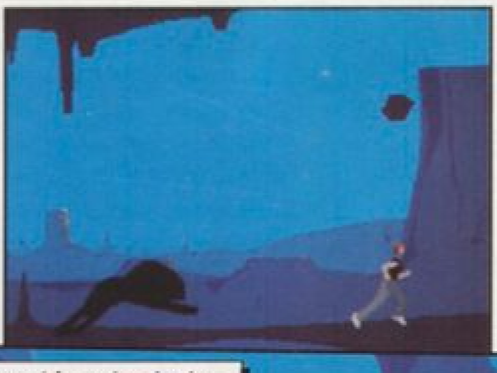
Run away! The Beast is gaining on poor Lester! Will he make it to the screen-flick point in time?

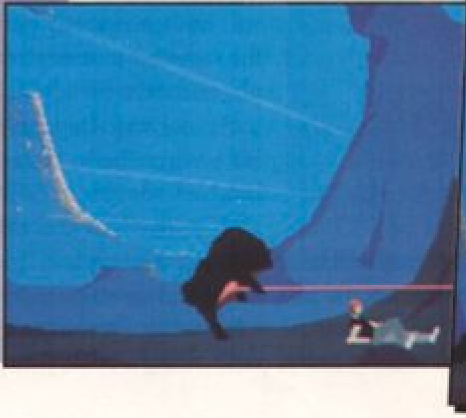


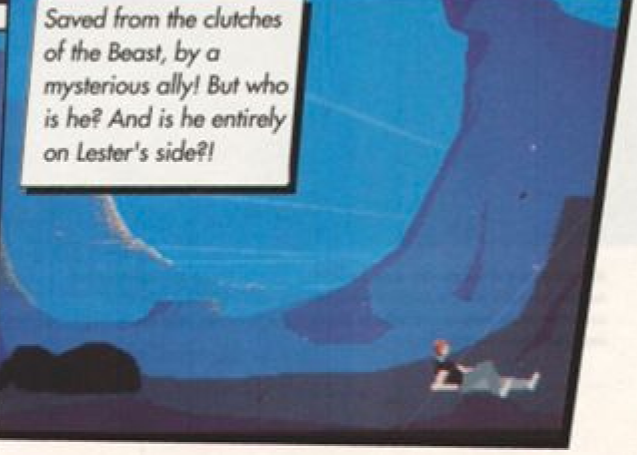




Dropping from the vine by releasing Fire, the player must hit the ground running!







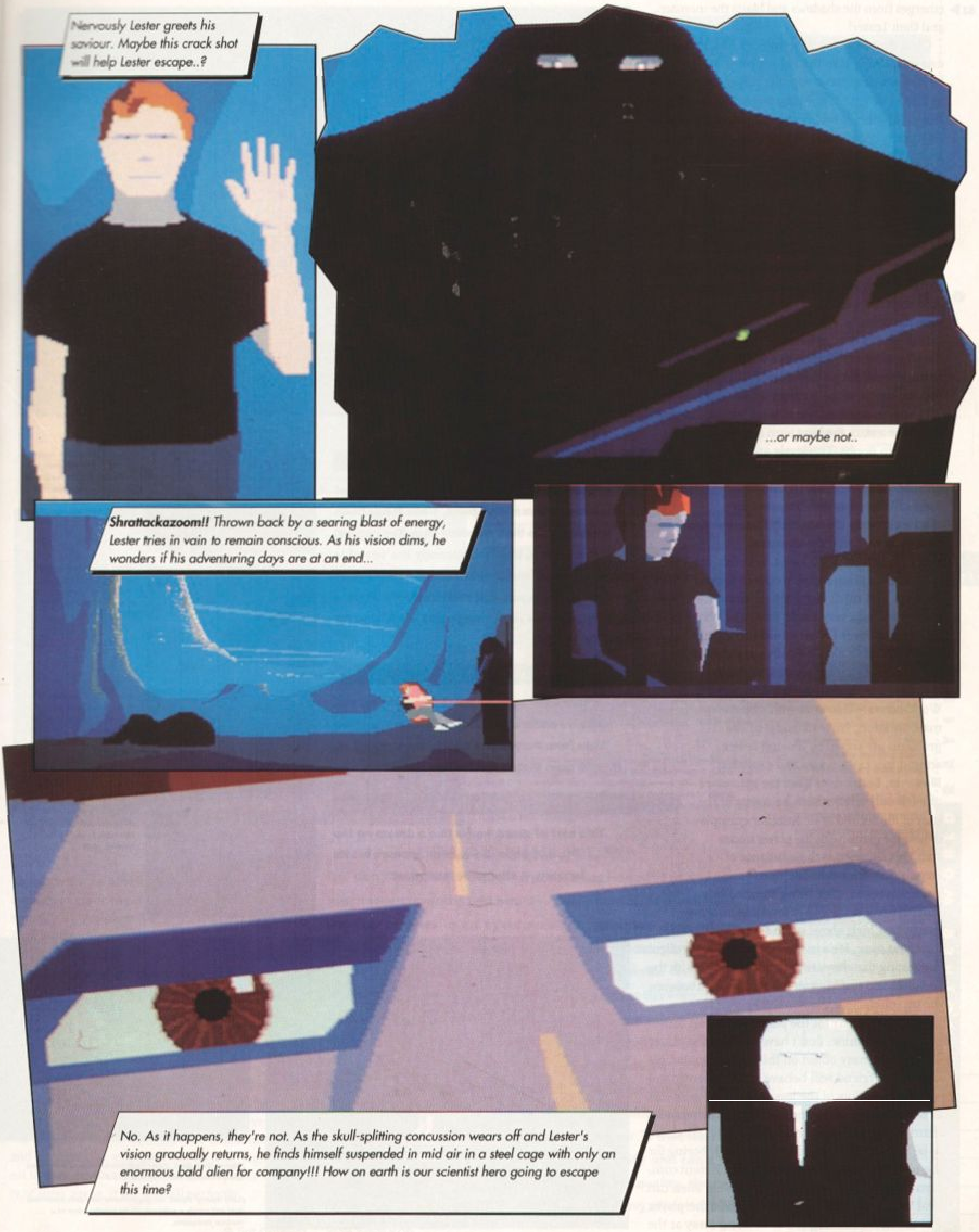
Saved from the clutches of the Beast, by a mysterious ally! But who is he? And is he entirely on Lester's side?!

AN UNLIKELY HERO

For a weedy looking git, our scientist hero actually has some balls, and he's a fairly tough cookie too, being able to withstand all sorts of scrapes.

Here, at the start of Level 1, Lester encounters his first life-threatening problem. While strolling across the apparently barren alien plane, Lester notices a strange, shapeless, um, shape following him in the mid distance. It isn't long before the beast catches up with Lester and the player must think fast if he's going to survive.

Examine the breakdown of this particular problem and you'll have a pretty good idea how the puzzles and action in the game work as a whole.


Nervously Lester greets his saviour. Maybe this crack shot will help Lester escape..?
...or maybe not..
Shrattackazoom!! Thrown back by a searing blast of energy, Lester tries in vain to remain conscious. As his vision dims, he wonders if his adventuring days are at an end...
No. As it happens, they're not. As the skull-splitting concussion wears off and Lester's vision gradually returns, he finds himself suspended in mid air in a steel cage with only an enormous bald alien for company!!! How on earth is our scientist hero going to escape this time?

51▶ emerges from the shadows and blasts the monster... and then Lester!

On a dramatic level, set pieces like this work extremely well. Like the big set-piece on the third level of *Prince of Persia* with the player haring along as fast as he could, jumping traps and clinging to ledges, Another World boosts the player's adrenalin level pretty successfully. The pursuing monster even leaps at Lester during his run to the left, its razor-sharp claws missing him only by a fraction of an inch.

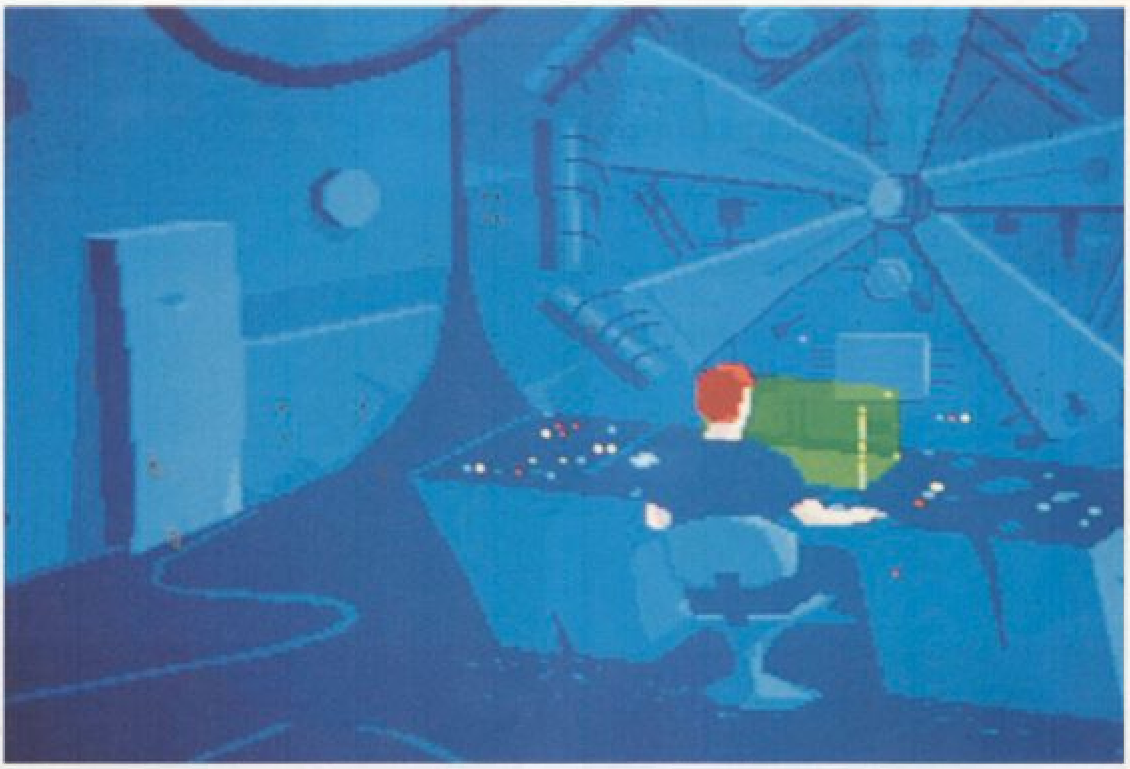
The penalty for being even the slightest bit sluggish during this sequence is instant death, depicted in most appealing yet violent cutaway scene. The monster who is just an enormous black panther-like blob flies out of the screen towards the player. And then it's a flurry of black hair and claws and then darkness.

Indeed, it's easy to become heavily involved in the plot and the adventure as a whole, largely thanks to the animations of Lester and the impressive and peculiar nature of the graphics which surround him.

However, Another World is not without its problems. For a start, the long term appeal of the game is in doubt. The levels are actually pretty short, comprising maybe three decent puzzles. Also, the studied weediness of Lester may well become a bit of an annoyance. It's extremely frustrating, as well, that the animated sequences which pop up (and, to be fair, are necessary to add atmosphere) can't be skipped through and must be watched, dramatic pauses and all, every single time. The player's control over Lester could be slightly more responsive too, especially since there's a great deal of running about to be done.

It should be made clear that Another World has very little to do with object-manipulation. Instead, most of the problems are solved by moving Lester around in a certain way and exploring. However, Lester does have the assistance of a friendly alien whom he meets at the start of the second level. Another example of how the game helps the player understand his situation is the avoidance of any clumsy friend-or-foe nonsense. Lester comes to, after being stunned by a hooded fiend at the end of level one, in a cage suspended high above some sort of rock breaking chain gang. He's in the cage with this big alien, suggesting that they are both out of favour with the bad guys, and implying an immediate bond between the two characters.

It's rather handy for the player (and most convenient for Delphine, don't have to allow the player to play with every object on the landscape) that his new found friend will behave independently and will deal with lots of the less interesting elements of some puzzles. Escaping from the jail screens, for example, requires the access code for the exit doors to be broken. As it would be fantastically boring for the player to have to bash away with different combinations, the story dictates that the big alien can deal with such tiresome aspects while the player has the more exciting job of blasting away at the



Amiga version

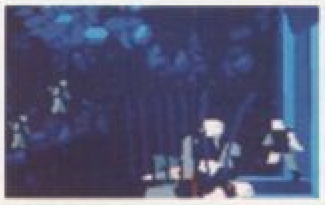
Amiga owners are obviously going to get the best implementation of the game, since it has been developed on their machine first. The biggest criticism is that occasionally the speed is a little lacking, but on all other fronts it works exceptionally well. In particular, the music and sound effects conjure up a realistic impression of a strange new world ripe for exploration. No, really.

ST version

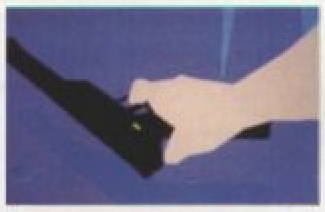
Not much news on the ST version as yet, but we understand that our onion-munching pals from across the waves are working on it right now. Watch out for updates soon.

PC version

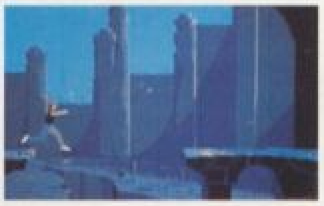
This sort of game works like a dream on the PC, and when the version appears in late january, it should be a stormer.



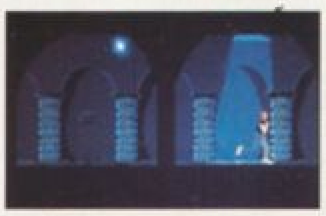
Swinging in the cage at the start of level 2 will result in a crushed guard and freedom for you and your fat friend. And what is that lying on the floor to the right of the cage...?



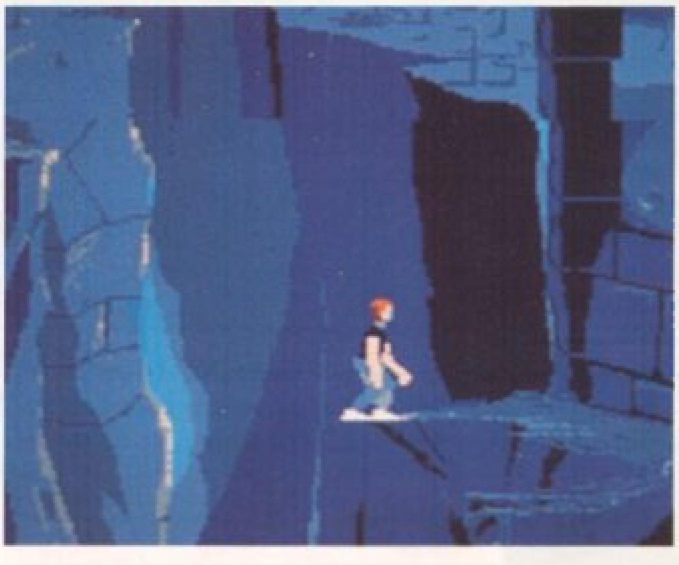
...It's a gun! Pick it up Lester, you spindly little pacifist. It's time to stop crying into your Benetton T-shirt and start kicking alien butt!

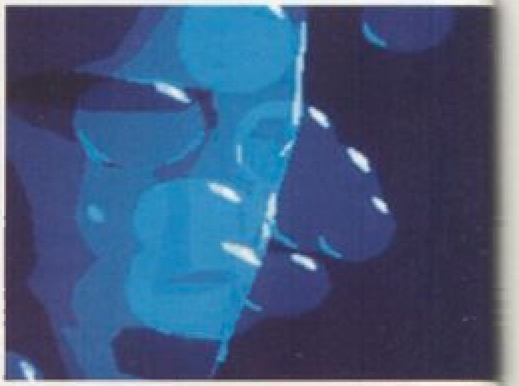


Although he's no Prince of Persia, Lester runs along at a reasonable enough pace, but it's sometimes tricky to time his jump.



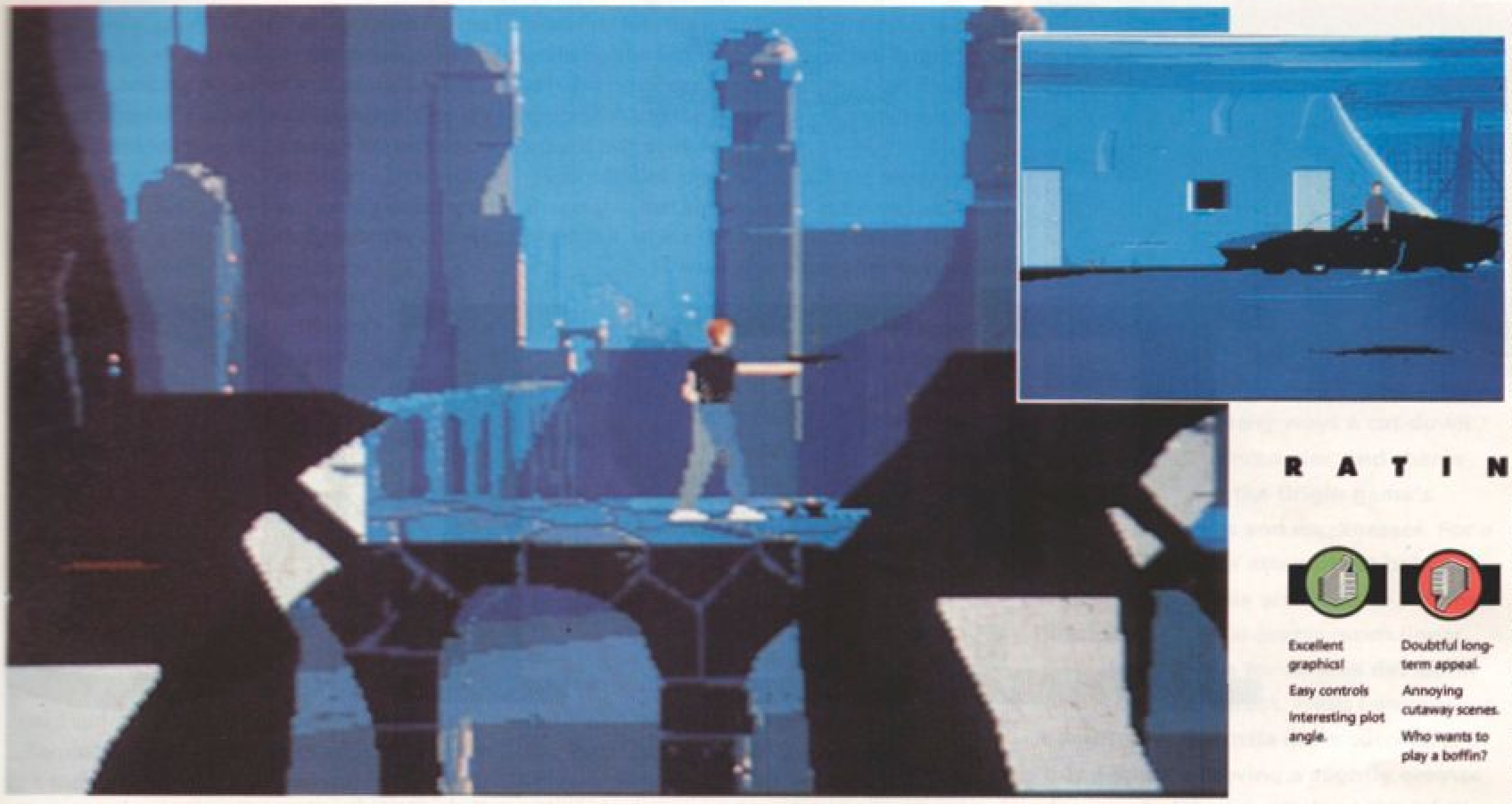
Have you noticed that all these alien worlds are always blue? Can't move for the bleeding stuff.



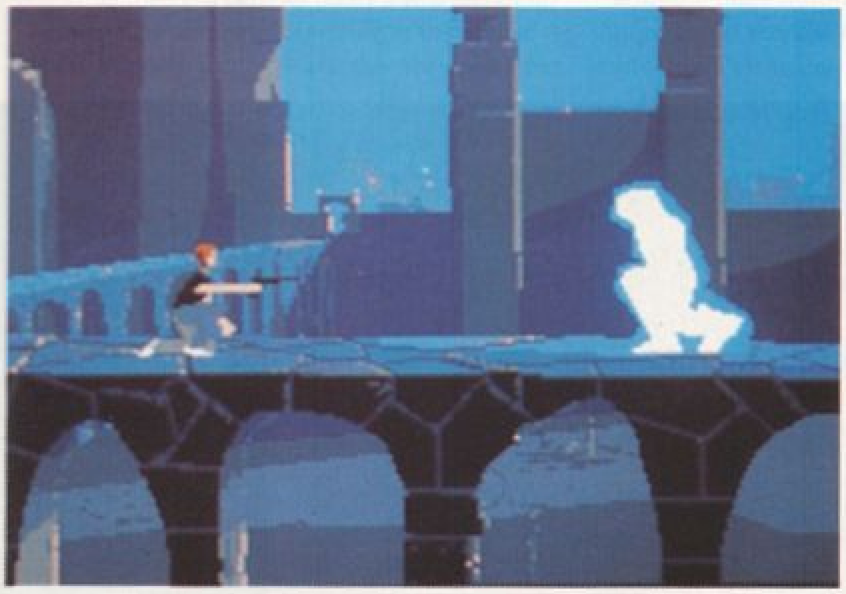


(Above) Glug! Glug! Lester finds himself in deep water once again. In fact, it's so deep that he's drowned to death!

(Left) Hooray! Finally our ginger-haired man gets something right and avoids a spikey death by jumping clear of a viscious stalagmite.



(Above) Lester battles the mysterious alien soldiers during level three. A far cry from his comfortable home (inset) of luxurious motors and Coke



(Left) The player has three forms of fire available to him once the gun has been located at the start of the second level. There's normal fire (as seen here), there's a shield and a blaster bolt. Be warned, however, that the gun has a limited number of shots, most of which have to be used in certain situations. Also, players who go around blasting things willy nilly are likely to come a cropper.

(Left) Lester gets the customary identification scan at his base

guards with his new laser gun to give his pal time enough to crack the code. Elements like this occasionally lift Another World up into the Extremely Exciting bracket.

Delphine should be congratulated on producing a game which is completely distinct from the bulk of titles on the market. Even the most sniping critics would have to concede that it's an interesting direction to pursue, and the balance between a visual treat and a decent game had been reasonably well struck.

Overall, let's be certain, Another World is a pretty impressive game. It's got plenty of drawbacks but on the whole, it scores a big plus. For players looking for a new angle on the arcade adventure genre, and in particular anyone who has a stronger interest in new graphic styles than the depth or longevity of their game, it fits the bill perfectly.

● Jim Douglas

PLAY THE FILM!

No, don't laugh. We know the phrase has had a bit of a mauling in recent months and now the very mention of it will have smarter readers in an eyebrow-aloft, upturned nose situation. But Another World comes closer than most, partially as a result of setting its sights on a more reasonable level.

In fact, it's more like Playing the Comic than the Film, since all of the graphic scenes which the player controls are in 2D side-on mode which are surprisingly reminiscent of the more stylish French comic books around at the moment.

Even controlling the character of Lester after a while doesn't become too bad, as he's quite agile and believable.

A definite point against the game, however, is that the cutaway scenes must be watched in their entirity and can't be clicked through. While they're largely of a high quality, they're far too long to be anything other than irritating after the second viewing.

ANOTHER WORLD RATINGS

Excellent graphics!	Doubtful long-term appeal.
Easy controls	Annoying cutaway scenes.
Interesting plot angle.	Who wants to play a boffin?

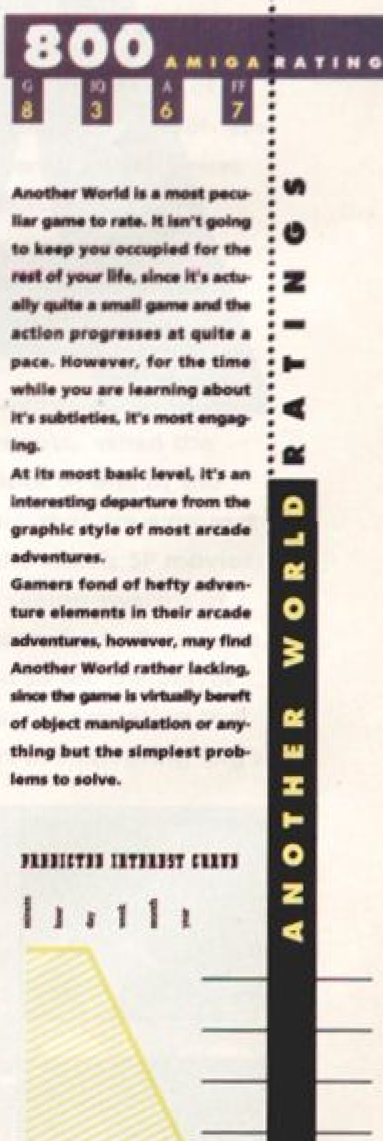
800 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	3	6	7

Another World is a most peculiar game to rate. It isn't going to keep you occupied for the rest of your life, since it's actually quite a small game and the action progresses at quite a pace. However, for the time while you are learning about it's subtleties, it's most engaging.

At its most basic level, it's an interesting departure from the graphic style of most arcade adventures.

Gamers fond of hefty adventure elements in their arcade adventures, however, may find Another World rather lacking, since the game is virtually bereft of object manipulation or anything but the simplest problems to solve.



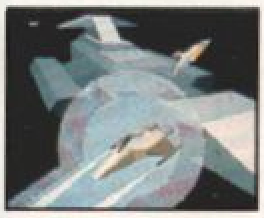
Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Ocean
Developer Digital Image Design
Price £25.99
OUT NOW

EPIC

A Long Time Ago, in a Galaxy Far, Far Away...

Their homeworld under threat from an unstable sun, a rag-tag fleet of humanoid ships flees the imminent supernova. The only path of escape lies through the heart of the hostile Rexxon Empire, where diplomatic attempts to negotiate a peaceful passage have been savagely rebuffed.

Having no alternative, the humanoid fleet, offered meagre protection by the Star Carriers RedStorm and BattleAxe and a handful of Star Fighters, enters the Neutral Zone bordering the Rexxon Empire and prepares for war - a war it did not want. But although severely outnumbered, the fleet has a Top Secret prototype one-man Star Fighter that just may save the nomad race from total extinction...



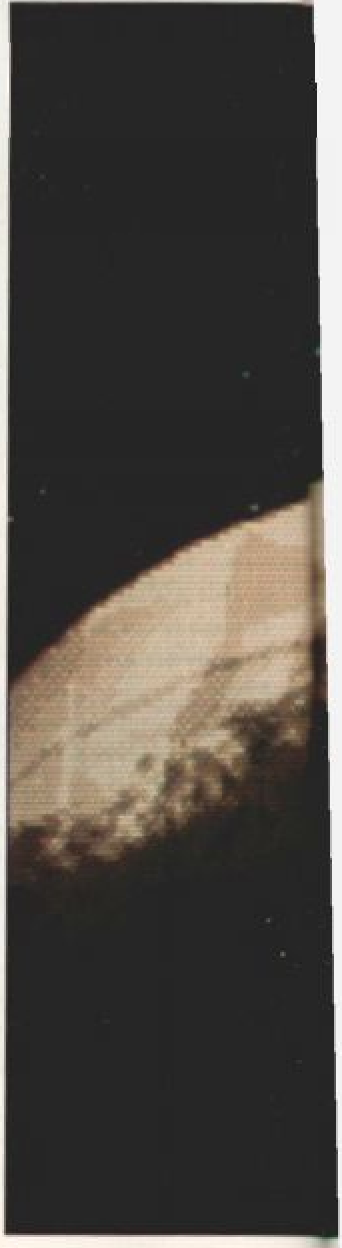
And so begins Epic, a sprawling space quest across a thousand Light Years (it says here). Epic is one of those games, much like EA's *Birds of Prey*, that has been previewed so much and for so long that you half think that it's already been released. Digital Image Design, who also produced last month's excellent *Robocop 3*, and its games is obviously like London Transport and its busses - you wait for ages then two come along at once. But after almost two years development, can Epic possibly live up to the hype?

To be honest, it doesn't - but it has a bloody good try. At heart, Epic is simply a glorified 3D space shoot-'em-up, but then that's like saying *Super Mario World* is a glorified *Manic Miner*. The game is split into ten land- or space-based missions, each requiring that the player complete a certain task or destroy a certain number of enemy ships or installations to succeed. Depending on the player's performance, the game plot chops and changes accordingly.

Epic is aimed fair and square at the player who's more interested in shooting aliens rather than talking to them. Each mission is preceded by a none-too-attractive text screen briefing the player on the job ahead. The player may have a time limit to complete the mission in, and in some cases taking too long can have very serious consequences.

In common with many action 'sims' (Core's *Thunderhawk*, for example), launching and landing are handled by the computer - none of that 'matching ship and docking bay rotation' shenanigans so beloved of *Elite* here. Epic handles these sequences better than most, depicting them as a series of animations viewed from a variety of 'dramatic' camera angles, complete with some good digitised speech for extra atmosphere. However, good as they are, familiarity breeds contempt, but by hitting ESCAPE they can be skipped.

Coming out of the launch sequence, the view switches to inside the cockpit of the Epic craft, the fleet's



revolutionary (and Top Secret) one-man fighter. Control is largely restricted to the mouse, with the buttons providing a spurt of velocity or a burst of fire from the currently-selected weapon. The keyboard is restricted to cycling through the various onboard weapons systems. The player starts with a pitiful handful of weapons that have about the same effect on the big ships as flicking peanuts at them, but during the course of the game the fleet scientists develop new and better lasers and missiles. By the time the last mission is reached the player is able to choose between fourteen systems.

While the control system is not quite as elegant as *Thunderhawk*'s 'all on the mouse' system, it's still very good. In addition to the ship controls there are also keys to cycle through the cockpit views and a plethora of 'out-of-cockpit' views, complete with zoom in/out facilities. For those with a fear of mice, there are also options to use the keyboard and/or joystick for all the flight controls.

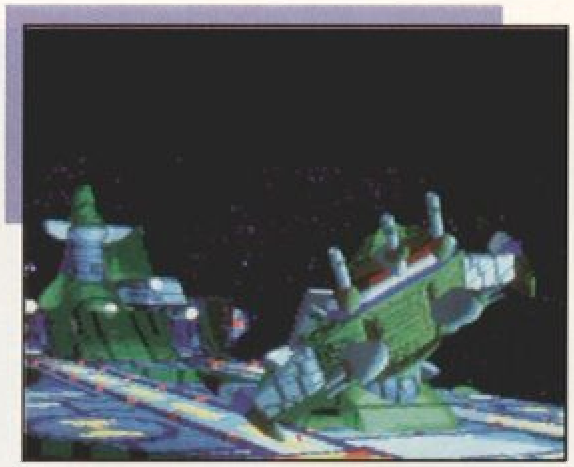
Combat takes place either in space or above a planet's surface. Since the Epic craft is fitted with anti-gravity repulsers, it handles pretty much identically in either environment. Planetside, if the mouse is left the ship will simply float rather than plummet nose first into the ground. And while this is hardly realistic, the fact that the player can forget about aerodynamics and get on with the high death-rate zapping makes the game very enjoyable from a pick up and play point-of-view.

Space battles, it has to be said, are pretty special. Remember that big space war at the end on *Return of the Jedi*, where the Millenium Falcon flies into wave after wave after wave of TIE fighters? There are times in Epic when the player gets into some very similar hair-raising scrapes, with clouds of *Rexxon ships veering in*, then peeling off to give chase.

The battles around the big ships are excellent too, but due to the low detail level on the ships (admittedly necessary to keep the game speed up) it can be difficult getting a sense of scale. Too often the cruisers look as small as the fighters, and it's only their behaviour that differentiates them. Get close, though, and the differences get very obvious. Particularly nice is the way the player can weave between the towers and struts on the Star Carriers.

With the huge number of ships zipping about, things can get very chaotic and, at first anyway, very confusing. Fortunately DID have addressed ▶60

At heart, Epic is simply a glorified 3D shoot-'em-up, but then that's like saying Super Mario World is a glorified Manic Miner.

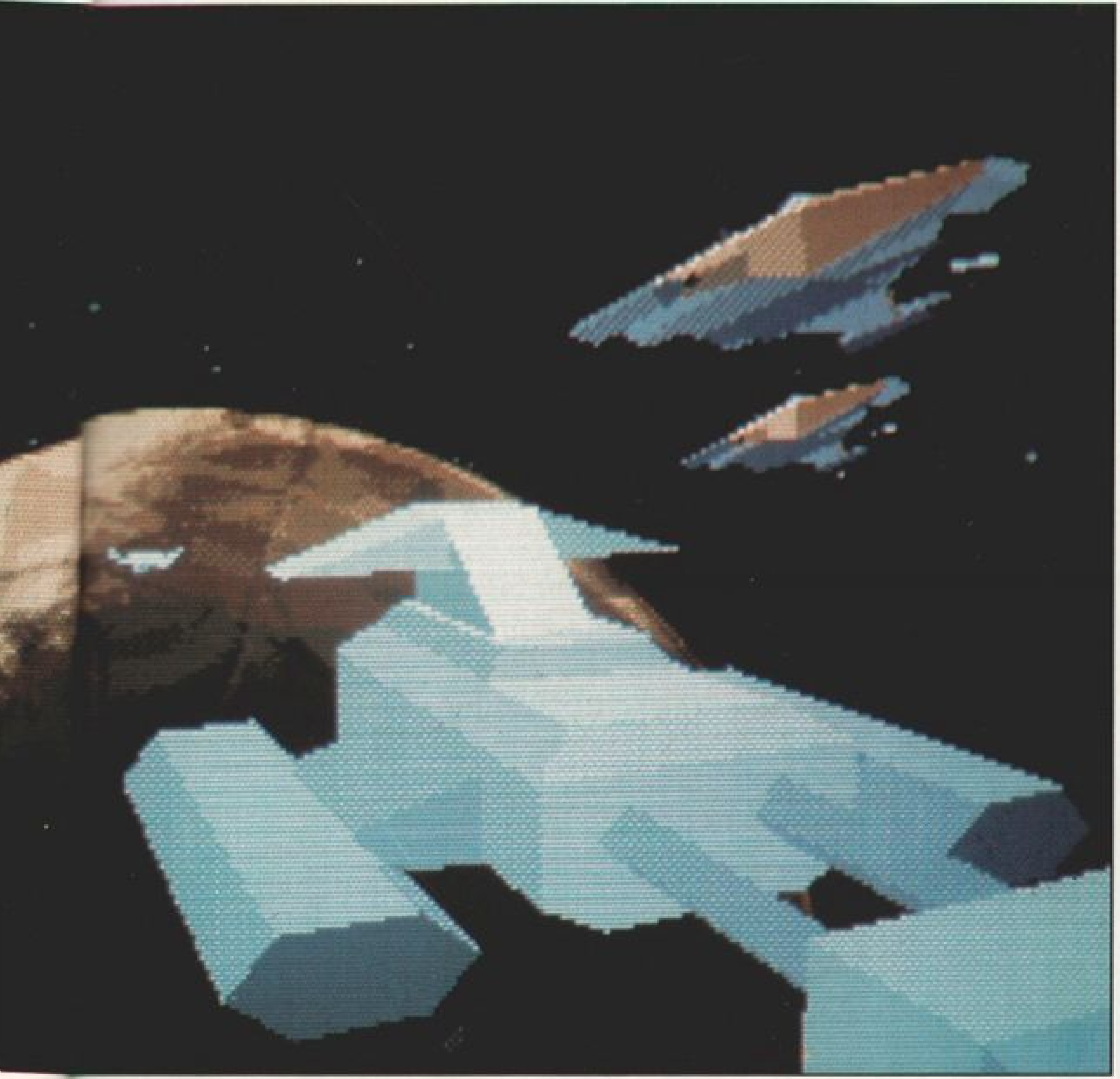


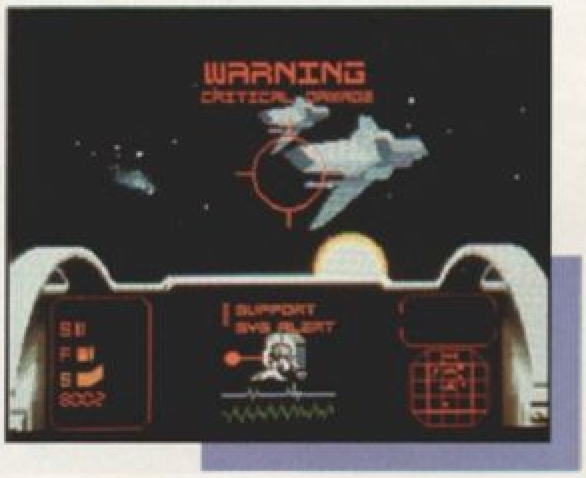
compare & contrast

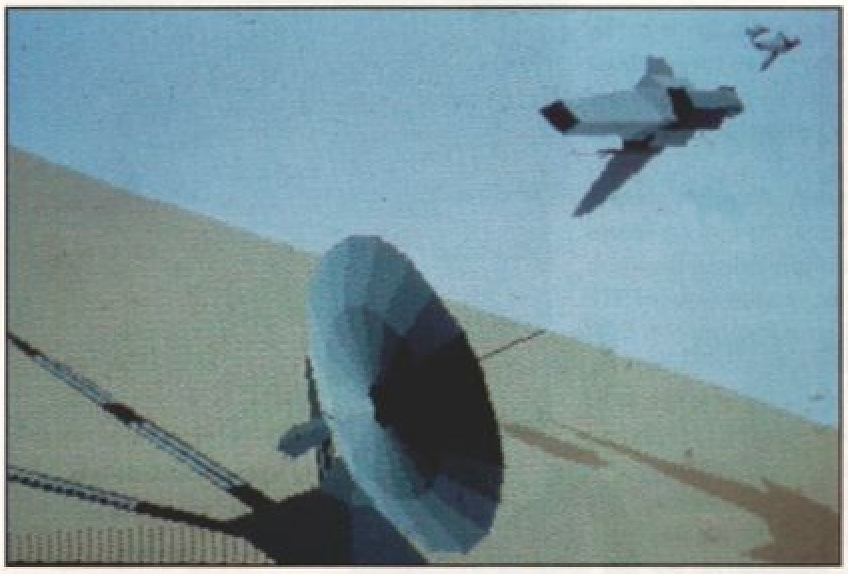
Epic is in many ways a cut-down Wing Commander, and shares many of the Origin game's strengths and weaknesses. For a start, Epic's attempts at being an 'interactive' movie are weak to say the least. Epic's plot is pretty much linear, with little chance for serious deviation from the main thrust. Wing Commander, admittedly, is a little more successful in this respect, allowing a slightly greater degree of plot variance (and the 'plot' screens are more attractively presented to boot).

In essence Epic, like Wing Commander, is really nothing more than a string of well-presented, high-quality 3D shoot-'em-ups. But where Epic scores strongly over Wing Commander is that it runs quite happily (and certainly more than fast enough) on a standard issue ST or Amiga (as opposed to a high-end PC). Hooray! Power to the people!

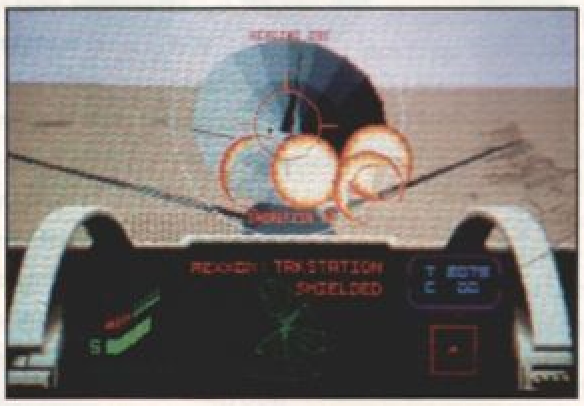
Epic is also more impressive in terms of scale. There's are moments, when the player flies into the thick of one of the really big space battles, that are exhilaratingly reminiscent of the classic SF movies. Entering a battle and seeing swarms of fighters swarming about the bulk cruisers, distant explosions and so on, the player gets a genuine thrill and a sensation that he really is taking part in something 'big'.



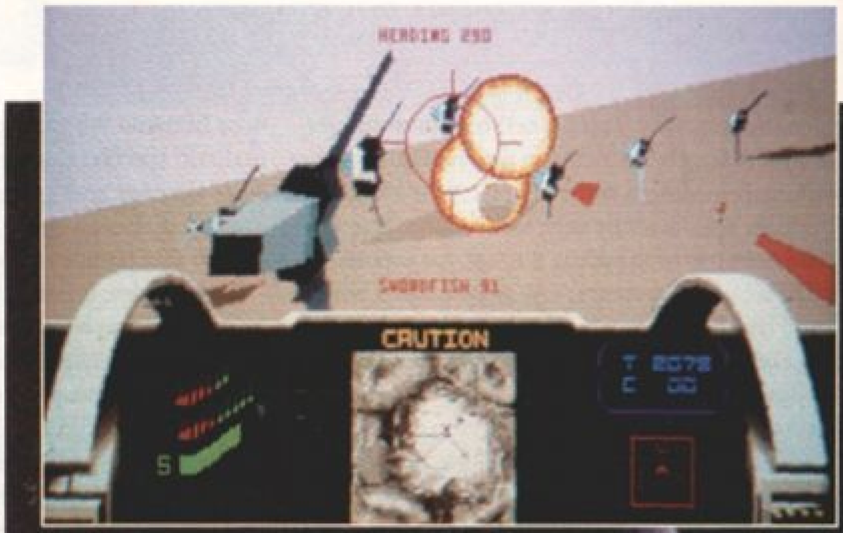




(Right) It all seems to easy at first. The scanning station isn't exactly difficult to spot - it's the size of a small mountain! However, there is a problem - it's protected by a forcefield. The player now has to find the generator powering it and destroy that first.



Most major installations are served by roads. Follow the roads and you should find them.



(Left and above) The player's futile attack has attracted unwanted attention. Rexxon fighters fly in to the station's aid, keen to see off the human threat. They know that sooner or later the player will realise that the shield can be deactivated by destroying the unprotected generator.

Dogfights with the enemy can get pretty hairy, mainly due to the number of ships zipping about. Go for the big ships first, only breaking off to deal with a fighter if it's locked on to you. Also, when you've picked a target, stay with it until it's been destroyed. Just taking potshots willynilly will earn you a oneway ticket to the space morgue.

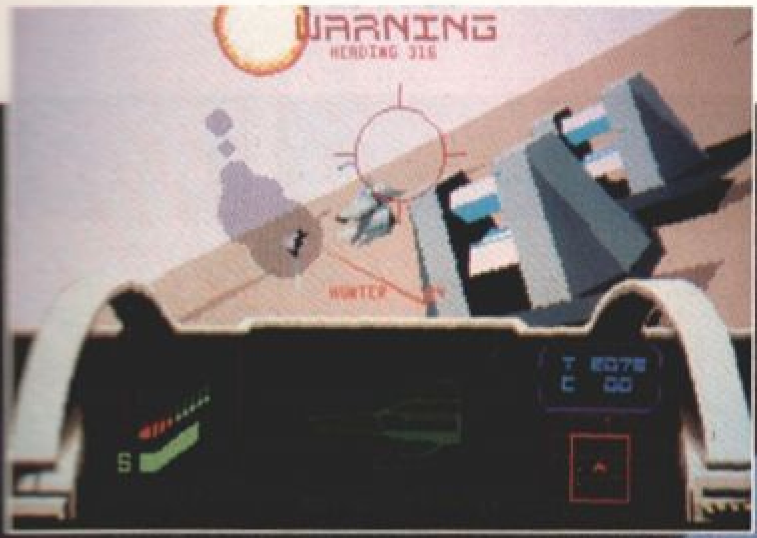
ATTACK ON AMRAGAN IX!

As the fleet starts to penetrate the edge of the Rexxon Empire, the player is sent on his first planet-based mission. The fleet's scouts have detected a Rexxon scanning station on the approaching planet of Amragan IX. Given the huge size of the fleet , there's no way that it can slip past unseen - and with the Rexxon armada only a few light years ago detection could be disastrous.

However, luck is on the fleet's side. The planet is in the process of eclipse, leaving it incapable of making contact with Rexxon central command for a short while. The player's task is to fly down to the planet and destroy the station before the end of the eclipse. Failure could mean more than death - it could spell the end of the whole race.

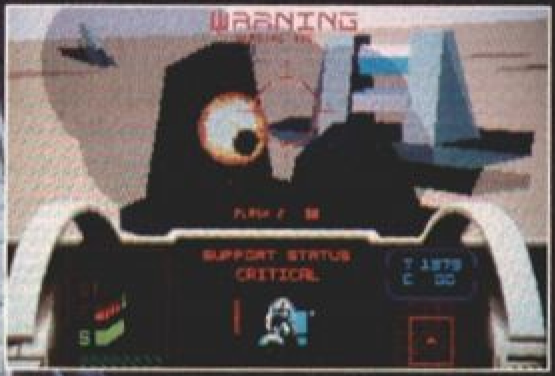
Here is the whole mission broken down step-by-step (starting above and progressing clockwise), to illustrate how a typical mission progresses. Read and learn - it could save your life.

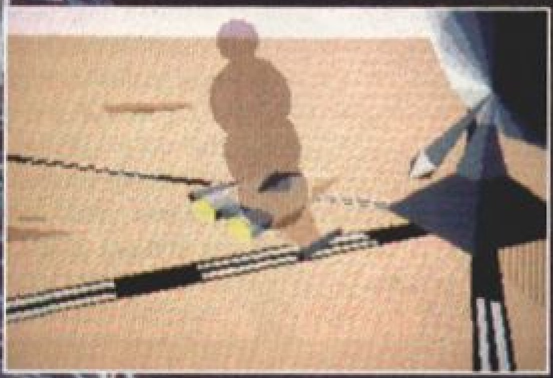
Although Epic is fundamentally an out-and-out blaster, there are quite a few twists on the basic shoot-'em-up gameplay with enough surprises to keep the player on his toes. It's far more than an alien turkey shoot.



Still being attacked by the doggedly-persistent Rexxons, the player finds the generator. At last, having been chased around the planet, it's payback time for the player...

Homing missiles are generally the best weapon to use for destroying enemy buildings. Once locked on, you can fire, forget and let the missile do the demolition work, leaving your hands free to tackle any enemy ships still on the prowl. While the ultra-powerful Epical weapon does a quicker job, it's very short range and you have to aim it precisely, leaving your back exposed.

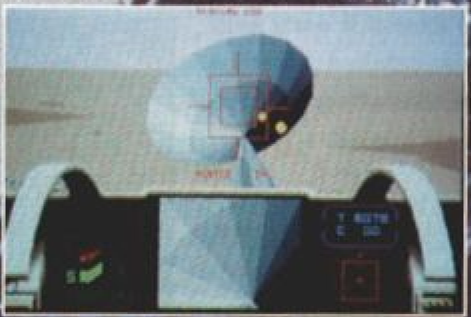


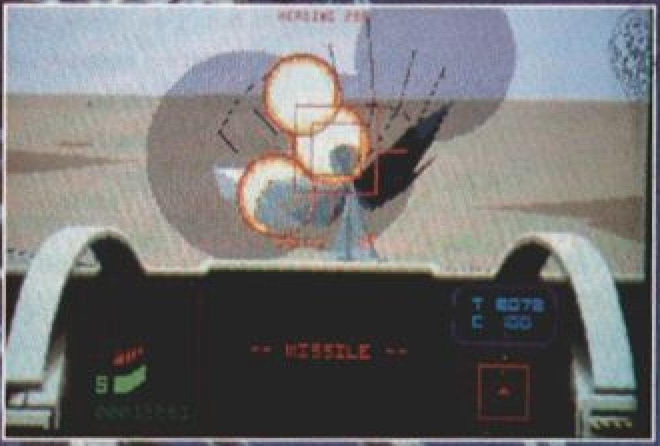


(Top) Those missiles certainly do the trick! The generator explodes in a cloud of flame and smoke, leaving only a charred pile of rubble in its wake. Now to mop up the few remaining Rexxon fighters and get on with the main mission...

(Above) Things are getting desperate. The scrap with the Rexxon ships may have ended in victory, but it has left the Epic fighter severely damaged. As it limps back to the generator, smoke pours from the damaged hull.

Don't go looking for a fight unless you're sure you can handle it. In a situation like this one, with shields low, pull out of the dogfight and try to finish the mission.



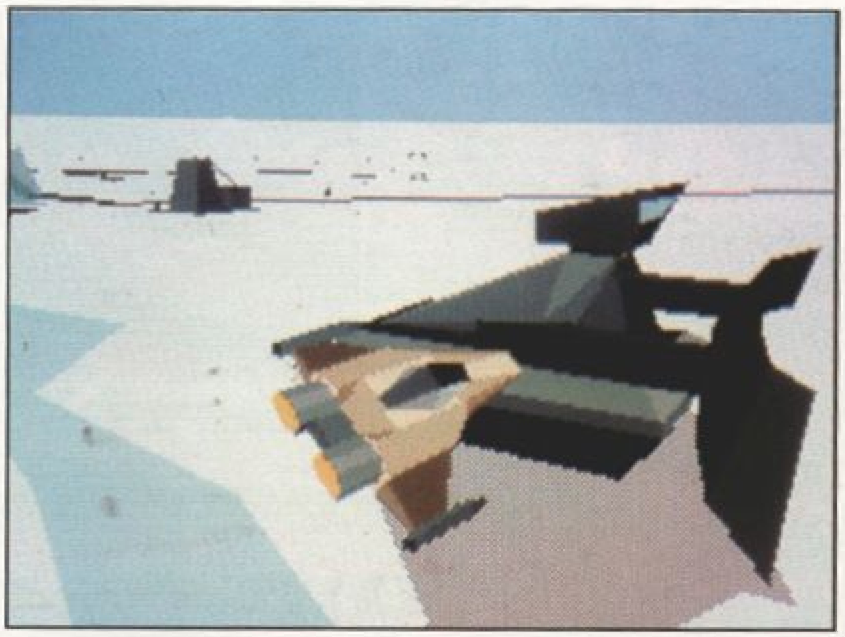


(Above and right) The scanning station is now unprotected and vulnerable. With no enemy presence to bother him, the player can take his time and take it out in style. A few plasma bolts weakens the scanner dish until eventually the whole building gives up the ghost, exploding to leave behind a few blackened struts and supports. Congratulations, player - Mission Complete!

57▶ this problem in several ways. For a start, the battles generally take place in a flat plane, with little vertical deviation. Thus, once the player finds where the action's taking place it's easy to stay with it. In addition, if the player is straying from the battlefield a warning noise sounds and a heading appears on the HUD (this heading can also be called up by hitting HELP). To prevent players blasting their own side, a large cross appears on the HUD if the player tries to lock on to a friendly ship. However, it's just advisory - you can still let rip if you're feeling particularly treacherous (though downing friendly craft only results in the player's score being reduced slightly).

The sheer scale of the battles acts both for and against the game. Some of the later missions in the game demand that the player destroy a huge number of enemy ships to win, and while it doesn't exactly get boring (there's always lots of enemy attention to keep you on your toes) downing ship after ship after ship can get a bit repetitive.

Talking of friendly ships, it's a shame you can't indulge in some sort of clichéd chatter with the fleet's other pilots. You know the sort of thing: "Look at the size of that thing!"; "Cut the chatter, Red Two"; "I'm hit!"; "It's an unknown energy form, Captain"; etc, etc. Too often it feels like you're fighting a one-man battle, and the occasional message flashed up on the cockpit VDU congratulating you on a good shot doesn't do anything to alleviate that.



(Above and right) Just two examples of some of the huge land-based objects. Doesn't the giant 'dozer (above) look a lot like the demolition 'droid Mek-Quake from 2000A.D.'s Ro-Busters? The pulse cannon (left) appears about two-thirds of the way into the game. It poses an obvious threat to the fleet and must be destroyed - by you, of course.

For my money, the planetside battles are more interesting than the space ones, largely because they're generally based around completing a task rather than just eliminating a certain number of the enemy. And in a lot of ways the graphics on the ground are even more impressive than those in space. There are some superb 'set pieces', such as giant cruisers lifting off from launch pads, huge mining bulldozers (and here huge means bigger than a mountain!) lumbering across desert plains, massive mountain-based gun emplacements, working monorail systems, the list goes on and on.

In a manner similar to Origin's *Wing Commander*, Epic frames its of space- and land-based battles with passive animated sequences and text screens whereby plot developments are conveyed to the player. The plot progression varies according to the player's performance in the missions.

As a no-nonsense blaster, Epic is an excellent game that more than lives up to its name in terms of scale.

ST version

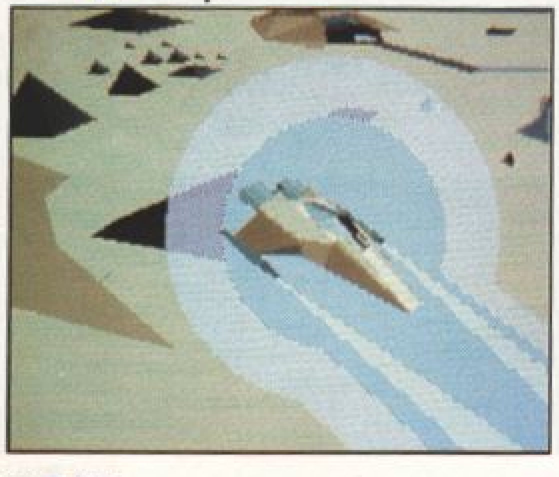
Fast just isn't the word for this 3D. You'll think that somehow a maths co-processor has got inside your ST when you see it - the image update is blistering. And if it still isn't fast enough for you, there are three detail levels to choose from. Sound, apart from the music, is generally good, although the Epic craft's engine noise leaves a bit to be desired. Disc swapping can be a problem later on in the game.

Amiga version

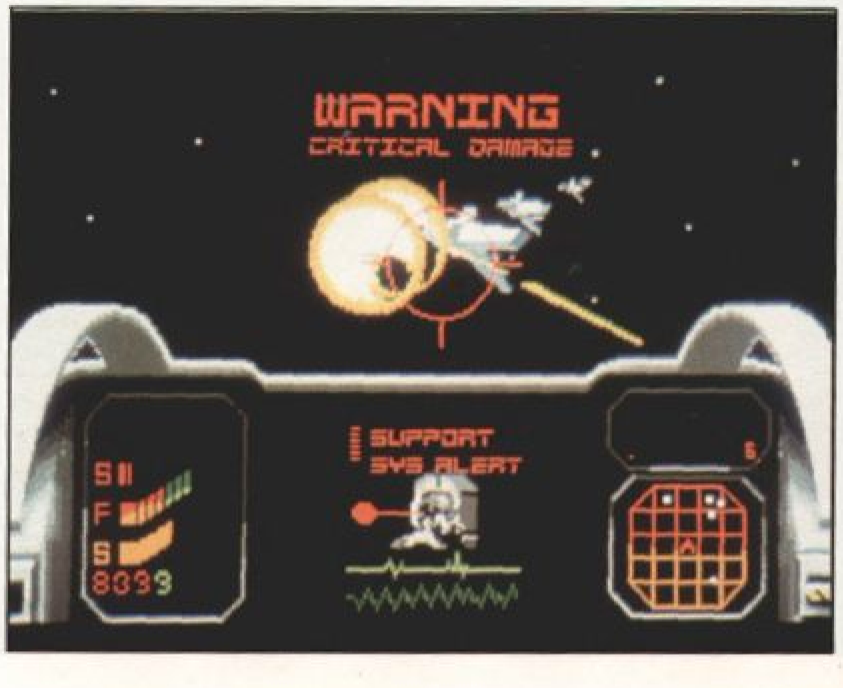
Amaze your friends and confound your enemies with the speed of the 3D! As usual, it's a little slower than the ST version but this is compensated for by better sound. Otherwise the game remains the same, and just as highly recommended.

PC version

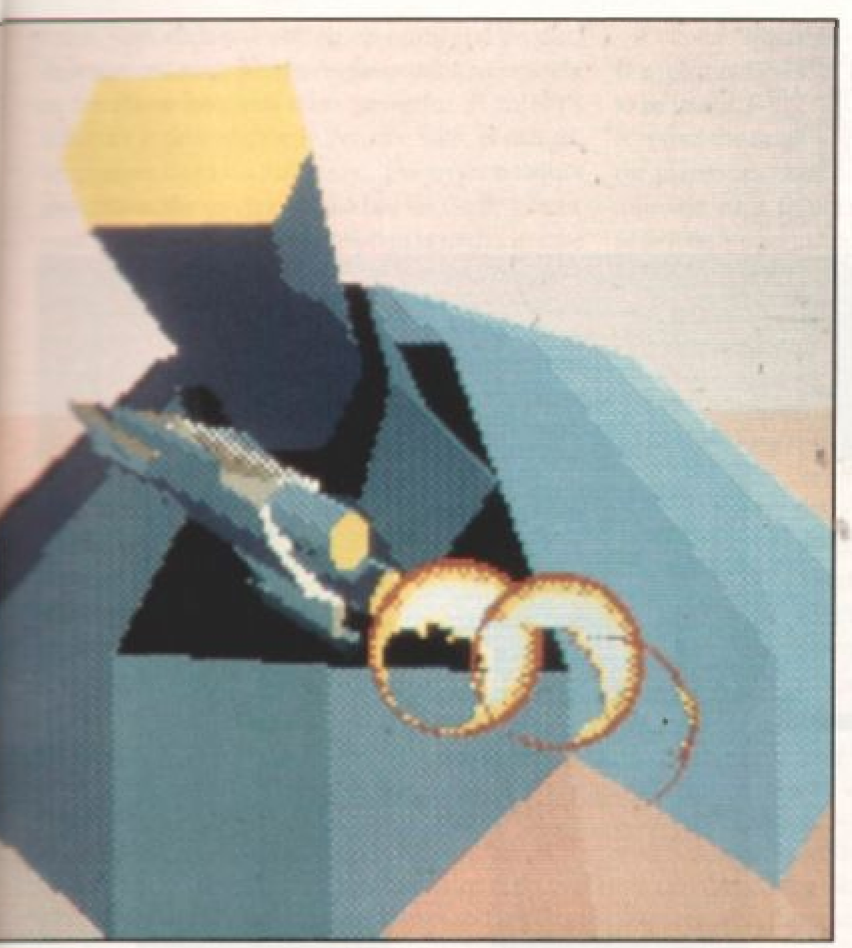
Sorry, it bain't be ready just yet. Expect it early next year, sporting redesigned super-detailed starships and more of them on the faster models. Check out the New Releases in the New Year for an update.



(Left) The all-powerful Epical weapon in full effect. This weapon is the pinnacle of the fleet scientist's research - although having a distinctly short range (you practically have to be touching the thing you want blasting), it makes up for this by being metal melting to the max. Nothing can stand up to a few blasts from this. Note the blue sphere around the Epic craft - it's opacity acts as an indicator to the strength of the hull shield.



(Right) A squadron of three Rexxon fighters makes an ill-advised pass in front of your ship's lasers. The mixture of bitmapped explosions overlaid on the polygon ships (first seen in F-29) is very effective.



DON'T I KNOW YOU...?

You'd be forgiven for getting a distinct feeling of déjà vu when playing Epic. So let's take a look at some of the game's more obvious... er... inspirations:

BATTLESTAR GALACTICA

The adventures of 'Starbuck' *et al* were notorious in their day (the late 70s) for being the most expensive TV shows ever at a whopping one million dollars per episode. To be honest it was difficult to see where the producers were spending the money - cardboard sets, rubbery aliens and endlessly-repeated special effects sequences made this a distinctly bargain basement *Star Wars* rip-off.

No prizes for spotting that Galactica's plot - about a pan-galactic search for Earth by a vagabond fleet of humans pursued by reptilian aliens - has been lifted pretty much wholesale for Epic. Shades of the Galactica itself are apparent in the design of the human Star Carriers, while the Rexxon fighters owe an obvious debt of thanks to the Viper fighters.

THE STAR WARS SERIES

Remember the exhaust port in *Star Wars*? Or the ion cannon from *Empire*? Or the shield generator from *Jedi*? DID obviously do. The Epic craft itself bears a strong resemblance to the little-seen A-Wing fighter (pay close attention during the climactic battle in *Jedi* and you should see it).

STAR TREK

Wooooh-ooooh, doo, doo, do, do, doooo! Ah, a timeless classic. While playing Epic keep a look out for a revamped Klingon Bird of Prey. As Spock would say: "Fascinating."

RO-BUSTERS

This classic 2000A.D. comic strip, which gave the World the inimitable android duo of Ro-Jaws and Hammerstein, also spawned the hulking demolition 'droid Mek-Quake. Scour the mining planet in Epic and you may meet his big brother.

And like *Wing Commander*, it is this supposedly 'interactive movie' element that's the least satisfying part of the game. Plot branching is limited, and tends to result in either the plot continuing on the 'winning' path or the game ending abruptly. (An identical criticism was made of DID's *Robocop 3* last month.) For example, do badly in one particular battle and you return to the mother ship to find the whole fleet decimated, end of game. The penalty of failure may well be severe, but this is ridiculous. Personally, given this limited level of storyline interaction, I would just have preferred a straight-forward series of plot-linked missions.

Another complaint is the actual presentation of these linking sequences themselves. Too often this takes the form of a screen of text over a starfield background. This is fine for the more trivial events, but for something like being awarded a promotion or returning to the fleet to find it decimated it'd be nice to actually see something.

The space animations are the best, where the player is shown such events as the fleet breaking up or Rexxon ships approaching. The choreography of these sequences is marvellous - cruisers, agroships and space junks lumbering across or into the screen, small convoy fighters zipping about them like gnats - and very reminiscent of the special effects produced by Industrial Light & Magic.

The only serious downpoint to these otherwise excellent sequences is the musical accompaniment. Surprise, surprise, it's bleedin' Mars from Holst's bloody Planet Suite. Sure, as a sample it's superb, but as a piece of dramatic music it's too familiar and frankly after the tenth time the strident horns and thumping rhythm are almost physically painful. Thank God for the option to turn it off. And for once, half-meg users can think themselves lucky because there's no room to load it on their machines anyway.

Occasionally there's a cut to the Rexxon base mothership where the evil alien commanders spout portentous dialogue at each other, but these are rare and - to be honest - none too effective. Also, given that the player never sees anything similar happening between the human characters (indeed, the humans are never seen up close at all), they seem strangely out of place. Since the player is meant to be playing the game from the humans' perspective, in many ways it would be better from a dramatic viewpoint if the behind-the-scene machinations of the enemy were unknown.

However, these animations are peripheral to the meat of the game, so these criticisms shouldn't be considered too damning. Let's face it, no matter how good these sorts of sequences are, they get dull after the umpteenth viewing and you always ending up skipping past them. As a no-nonsense blaster, Epic is an excellent game that more than lives up to its name in terms of scale. Admittedly the gameplay has about as much depth as a drying puddle, but when you're locked in a dogfight around a Star Carrier with three Rexxon fighters trying to squirt plasma up your backside that's the last thing on your mind.

● David Upchurch

ACE GRAPHICS

ACE IDEA

RATINGS

👍	👎
Incredibly fast 3D.	Some battles go on too long.
Exciting massive-scale action.	Ultimately shallow gameplay.
Good animated sequences.	Music becomes grating very quickly.

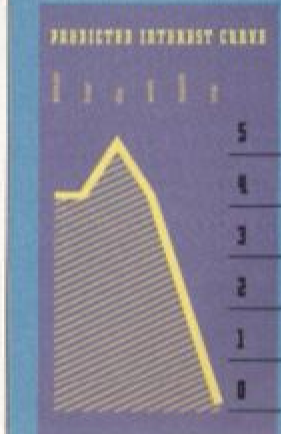
839 ST RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
10	4	5	8

839 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
10	4	6	8

Aaargh! What the Hell's going on? Where's the battle? Where's the fleet? Where's my mummy? Epic is very confusing at first, simply because of the huge canvas for the action. However, things do get a lot better very quickly. The first few missions are very short and simple and, given the hype, a bit disappointing. However, they are merely a taster of the huge battles later on which are excellent if a little protracted. The alternating between space and planet battles injects a modicum of variety into the endless blasting. But be warned, given the game's lack of real depth there's a more-than-average chance that you may tire of this sooner much rather than later.



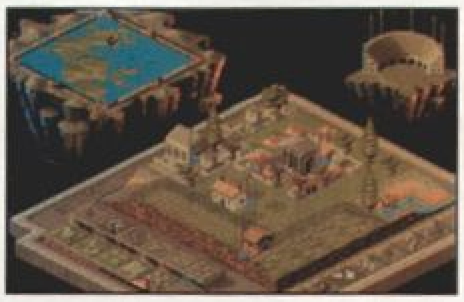
EPIC RATINGS

Genre Action Stategy
Publisher Electronic Arts
Developer Bullfrog
Price £29.99

POPULOUS II

There's a really nifty bit in Clash of the Titans when Zeus (aka the late Laurence Olivier) becomes angry with a certain, rather callous King for casting his earthly son Perseus out to sea to die. By way of retribution the white-bearded Ruler of the Gods releases the awesome Kraken on the monarch's beachfront kingdom. As the Kraken rises from the sea, it creates an enormous tidal wave which utterly destroys the city.

It's awesome destruction such as this that forms the very heart and soul of Populous II. Bullfrog's long-awaited sequel is bigger, badder and - yes, better - than the classic original. Though at the most basic conceptual level, nothing much has changed, such drastic sweeping enhancements have been made in terms of sheer scope and invention that Populous II makes its 1989 dad look positively mediocre by comparison. And while those who fell under the original's spell may find that a little hard to swallow, it is absolutely the case. Really really.



Populous II's settlements are far more sophisticated than those in the original, growing now into Greek-style Acropolises complete with gardens and surrounding walls! They're just as vulnerable to attack as ever before, however, and when a city grows to considerable size, the player should seriously consider erecting city walls around the boundaries to protect the population from attack.

One of the game's many favourable aspects is that Populous players will be able to settle in nicely with the minimum of fuss because, as mentioned before, the basic idea and objectives remain the same. Two opposing Gods representing the forces of Good and Evil respectively, battle it out for ultimate supremacy over a series of isometric landscapes, or "worlds". Not directly of course - deities are far too important to ever get their own knuckles grubby - but via the poor God-fearing population that live down on the planet. Split into two distinct tribes - one worshipping the player, the other the followers of the opposing deity, these misguided souls would like nothing more than to kick the stuffing out of the "infidels" across the water. All they need is a little help and guidance... It's like a great cosmic chess game played on a global scale, where real people are the pawns. And though they can't be controlled directly (this "free will" business can be a bit of a bind at times), they can be given divine nudges in the right direction. And of course, as Populous players will remember so fondly, Gods with sufficient power can take it upon themselves to intervene directly, unleashing awesome ethereal effects on the enemy's people and terrain. Earthquakes, volcanoes and all manner of horrid weather conditions can all be unleashed from the tip of the finger to create untold destruction and hassle for the opponent.

As in the original game, the trick to Populous II is to best exploit this free will stuff. Starting with just a couple of followers and minimal supernatural powers, a fledgling deity's initial objective is to flatten land - the game world is initially a rather mountainous affair, and hills and valleys must be levelled out in order for people to settle. Such manipulation of terrain is the most basic of all godly functions. As more flat land becomes available, the peoples' settlements grow larger, allowing nature to take its course and the population to expand accordingly. Two people become ten, twenty, a hundred and

more, with each one setting up camp and producing more and more people. As the population expands, so the player becomes more powerful, as a deity's influence is derived directly from the faith, or manna, he receives from his followers. The larger a deity's population, the more scope he has for Godly effects. And of course a sizeable population is useful in case the two opposing tribes come to blows. The game is won when every last member of one of the tribes is killed, so a large population, spread out over a wide area makes it all the more difficult for the player's opponent - be it the computer or a pal connected on another computer - all the more difficult to win.

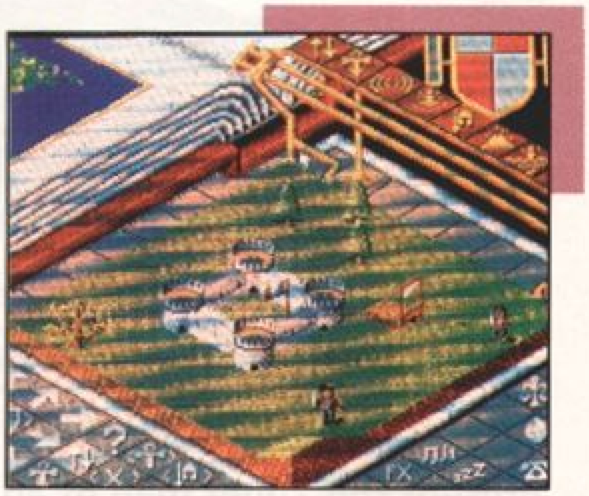
One of Populous II's minor changes - albeit an important one - is that not all people are the same. In the original game everybody was identical in terms of appearance and ability (which led to a few interesting questions about how the all-male population managed to procreate so successfully). Now the population is made up of three different types of character - men are the most basic, being a general all-purpose being with a particular edge when it comes to fighting. Old men are recognisable by their white beards and are a naturally weaker breed, moving more slowly and putting up less of a fight in combat. Women suffer from the same problem - a man will always have the upper hand against one in a fight - but they are much more resourceful during peacetime, finding it easier to locate land for settling. No doubt if the game had cooking and washing-up in it, they'd be better at that too.

It's in the "special effects" department that Populous II's most radical and impressive new elements are to be found. Forget about the paltry handful of godly acts that the original game offered - in Populous II the player can exert his divine influence in over 30 different ways, from the most harmless little touches to utterly devastating natural disasters. The effects are split into six distinct groups - People, Vegetation, Earth, Air, Fire and Water, with a variety of actions available within each. At the most basic level the player can plant trees and parkland, which improve the look of the area and make the people who live there happier, subsequently increasing the manna the player receives from them. Such environmental improvements can be taken further, as far as creating entire cities by laying down road networks and building protective castle-style walls around settlements. It's immensely satisfying to build an empire of this kind, as it gives an impression of being much more sophisticated, networked and citylike than the random scattering of settlements that previously formed the deity's population.

Vital though they may be, however, these "housekeeping" style effects are all pretty mundane when compared to those that can be found at the upper end of the scale. We're talking real awesome destructive power here. Many of the offensive effects are remodelled versions of those found in the original - Swamp, Earthquake, Volcano, Knight and Armageddon are all in there, filed under the relevant group headings, and all differ in some degree from their Populous counterparts. While the

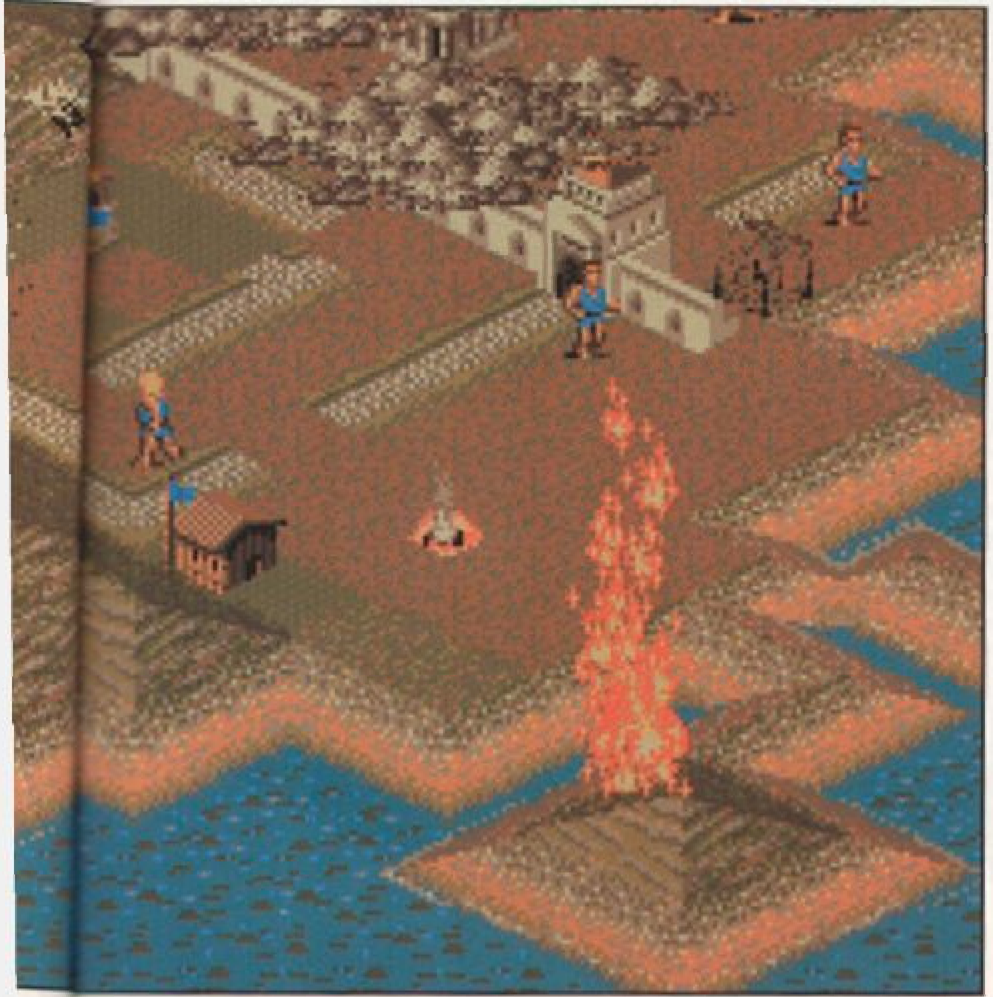
▶ 66

In terms of sheer scope and invention, Populous II makes the original game look positively mediocre by comparison.



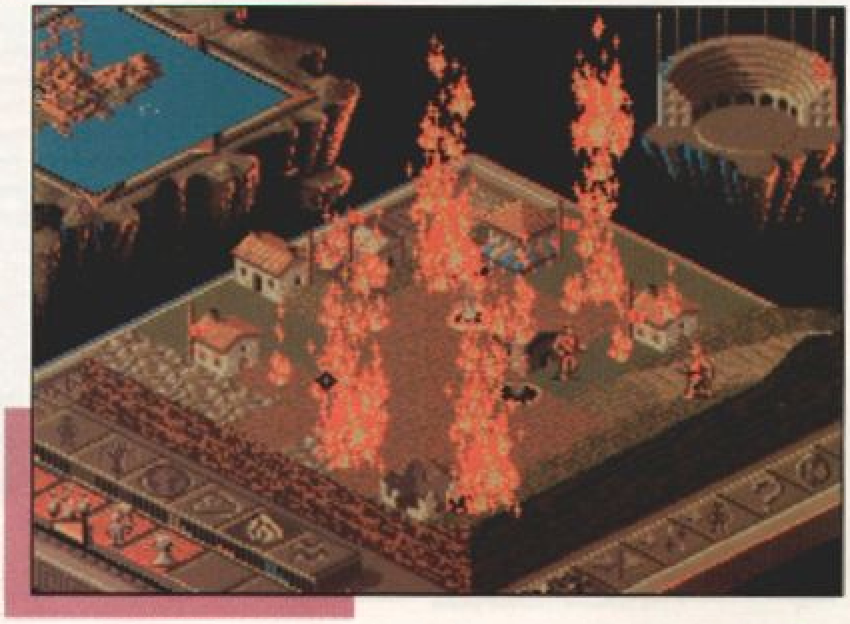
compare & contrast

It's been said before, and I'll say it again - Populous II makes the 1989 original look somewhat shabby by comparison, so great are the enhancements and additions that have been made. Perhaps the most obvious difference is the in the graphical department, where Populous II's visuals are not just a prettier face - they work better within the game itself, with effects like Earthquake and Volcano being considerably enhanced by the sophisticated way in which they are presented on screen. Some may argue that there's not enough radically new "stuff" to make Populous II sufficiently different from the original. It's worth remembering, however, that a totally new approach could well have been disastrous, as the original's formula was far too good to put to waste. Populous II pushes the potential of its novel display format far more than the original game did, while retaining the basic gameplay that made the whole thing work in the first place. For getting that mix of new elements and old just right, Populous II deserves special commendation.



(Left) One of Populous II's more surreal feature allows the player to view the game in full-screen mega-vision - the icons and surrounding stuff are shunted out of the way to make way for this visually stunning display. Even more impressive, you can still play the game, casting effects and building land! More practical players will prefer the conventional viewpoint, however.

(Below) Rain of Fire is cast on an unsuspecting village - anything the burning droplets hit is set immediately ablaze, with trees being particularly vulnerable.



POPULOUS II

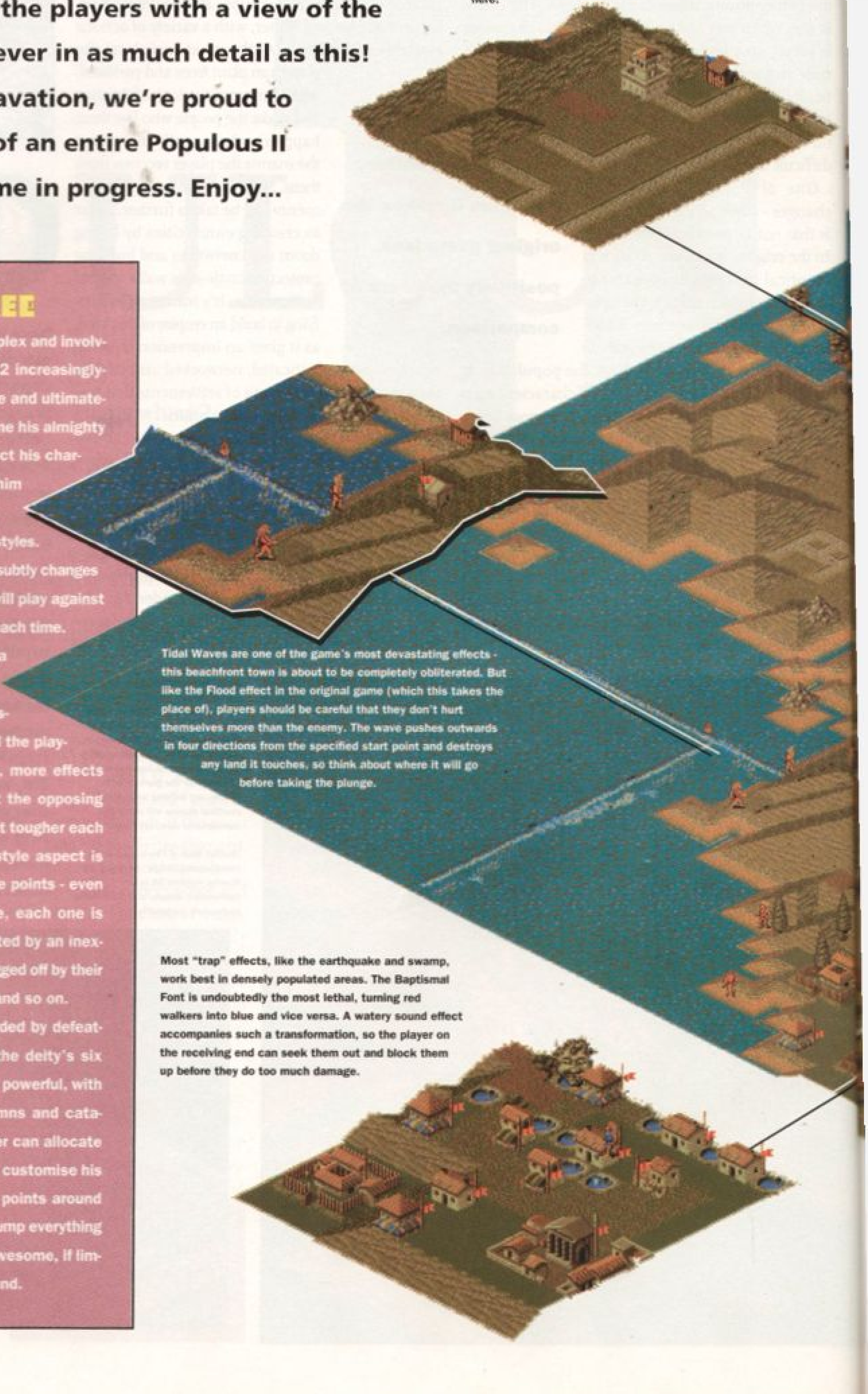
In Populous II, only about one fiftieth of the game world is ever visible on screen at a time. An animated map provides the players with a view of the overall situation - but never in as much detail as this! After considerable aggravation, we're proud to present this super map of an entire Populous II world, frozen with a game in progress. Enjoy...

THE CONQUER TREE

Populous II's Conquest Game is a complex and involving affair, taking the player through 32 increasingly-difficult levels in his quest to challenge and ultimately topple Zeus, God of Gods, and assume his almighty position. Initially, the player must select his character by naming his deity and giving him a face, selected from a variety of identikit-style eyes, mouths, noses and hairstyles. The type of face the player selects oh-so-subtly changes the way that his computer opponents will play against him, ensuring a slightly different game each time.

Initially, the player starts off as a weak and feeble deity, with only a handful of low-grade effects at his disposal, but as the game progresses and the player moves upwards through the levels, more effects become available to help him combat the opposing gods, who change in personality and get tougher each time. This 'progressive', almost RPG-style aspect is enhanced by the element of experience points - even with the full array of effects available, each one is rather laughable and pathetic if executed by an inexperienced deity - lightning bolts are shrugged off by their targets, volcanoes barely trickle lava and so on.

But as experience points (as awarded by defeated opponents) are added to each of the deity's six effect groups, the player becomes more powerful, with scorching lightning, searing fire columns and cataclysmic tidal waves. Because the player can allocate experience points as he wishes, he can customise his own playing style, choosing to spread points around and be equally powerful in all areas, or pump everything into one particular group and have an awesome, if limited, selection of powers at his command.



Walkers will always follow roads in favour of uncultivated land, and the shrewd player can use this fact to his advantage, laying down track for walkers to follow and thereby guiding his people towards a specific area. They have a more sinister use too - why not set a trap in enemy territory, then lay a road leading from one of the major towns right towards it? Inevitably the dumb-ass walkers will follow the pathway, right into the jaws of the trap! You can also make pretty patterns, like the Bullfrog logo seen here.

Tidal Waves are one of the game's most devastating effects - this beachfront town is about to be completely obliterated. But like the Flood effect in the original game (which this takes the place of), players should be careful that they don't hurt themselves more than the enemy. The wave pushes outwards in four directions from the specified start point and destroys any land it touches, so think about where it will go before taking the plunge.

Most "trap" effects, like the earthquake and swamp, work best in densely populated areas. The Baptismal Font is undoubtedly the most lethal, turning red walkers into blue and vice versa. A watery sound effect accompanies such a transformation, so the player on the receiving end can seek them out and block them up before they do too much damage.

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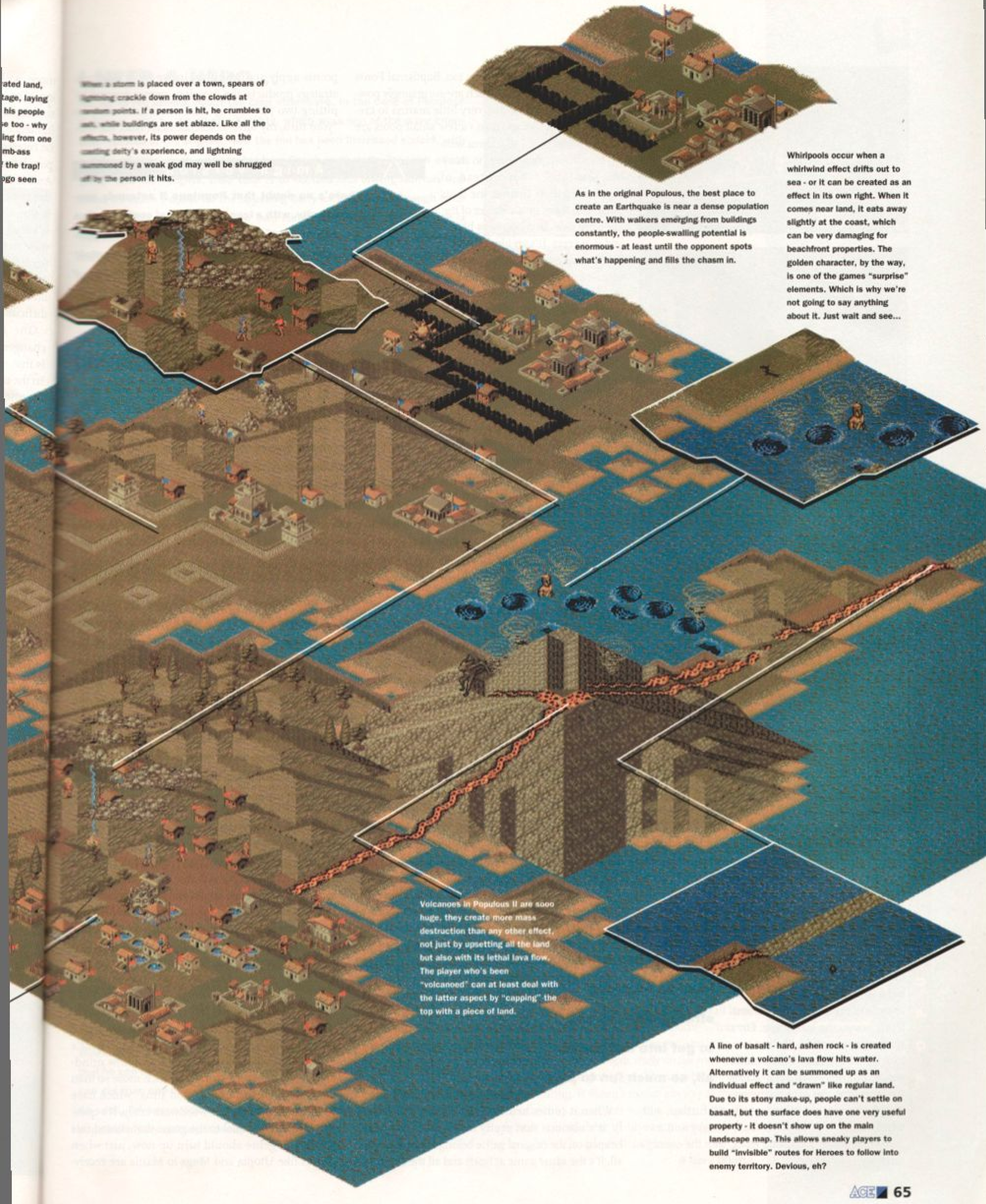
When a storm is placed over a town, spears of lightning crackle down from the clowds at random points. If a person is hit, he crumbles to ash, while buildings are set ablaze. Like all the effects, however, its power depends on the casting deity's experience, and lightning summoned by a weak god may well be shrugged off by the person it hits.

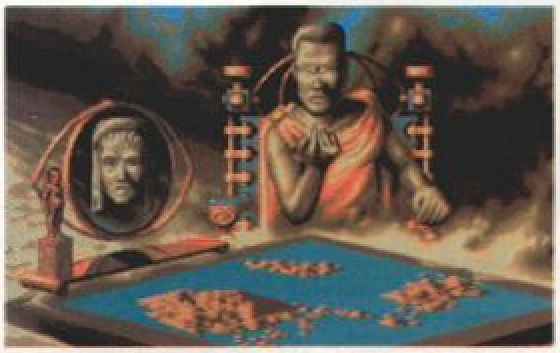


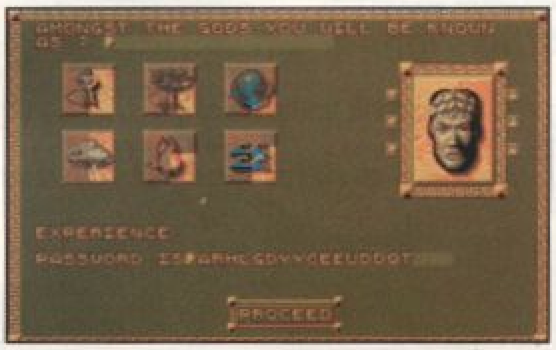
As in the original Populous, the best place to create an Earthquake is near a dense population centre. With walkers emerging from buildings constantly, the people-swalling potential is enormous - at least until the opponent spots what's happening and fills the chasm in.

Whirlpools occur when a whirlwind effect drifts out to sea - or it can be created as an effect in its own right. When it comes near land, it eats away slightly at the coast, which can be very damaging for beachfront properties. The golden character, by the way, is one of the games "surprise" elements. Which is why we're not going to say anything about it. Just wait and see...

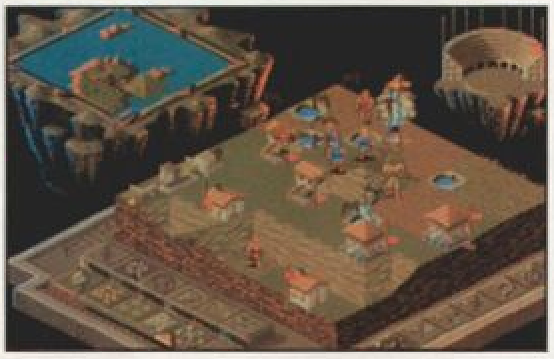
Volcanoes in Populous II are sooo huge, they create more mass destruction than any other effect, not just by upsetting all the land but also with its lethal lava flow. The player who's been "volcanoed" can at least deal with the latter aspect by "capping" the top with a piece of land.

A line of basalt - hard, ashen rock - is created whenever a volcano's lava flow hits water. Alternatively it can be summoned up as an individual effect and "drawn" like regular land. Due to its stony make-up, people can't settle on basalt, but the surface does have one very useful property - it doesn't show up on the main landscape map. This allows sneaky players to build "invisible" routes for Heroes to follow into enemy territory. Devious, eh?




AMONGST THE GODS YOU WILL BE KNOWN AS :

EXPERIENCE



63▶ swamp, for example, behaves almost identically and only looks different, the earthquake is radically new and improved - instead of just jumbling the land around a bit, this Earth effect now creates a giant snaking fault-line, tearing the land apart and leaving a deadly abyss for hapless walkers to stumble into. The Volcano is another fine example of how the effects are now more sophisticated. Like the original, it creates a huge rocky and mountainous mass which uproots all the terrain around it, but now it comes complete with lethal lava flow, which runs down the sides and across the land at the bottom, torching any people or buildings in its path.

Though these upgraded versions of the original game's effects are all fine and worthwhile, the real fun is to be had with the new ones, where innovation and devastation go hand in hand in a manner never before seen. Deities can create stormclouds which send spears of lightning crashing down towards Earth, destroying entire buildings, or burn whole villages with an eerie column of fire which moves relentlessly across the landscape. On a more elaborate scale, why not conjure up a hurricane which blows people, property - even trees - across the landscape and out into the sea. The destructive power increases still further, with whirlwinds, fire that rains from the sky and awesome tidal waves all playing havoc with the enemy's territory.

Not since the original Populous has a game been so engaging strategically, so easy to get into and above all, so much fun to play

There are a few weird effects too. Baptismal Fonts are an odd little number which are surprisingly powerful, given that they take very little manna to create. They work like swamps - a few small pools are dotted around over a small area waiting for some hapless walker to stumble into one - but instead of consuming their victims, the fonts transform them into a walker of the opposite side. Red becomes blue and vice versa. It's an ideal way of infiltrating enemy territory with soldiers as they are created automatically from inside the city's defences! Another dirty trick is Plague - simply select any member of the opposing deity's followers to curse them (indicated by a vulture circling over their heads) and anybody who comes into contact with them becomes infected also. In this way the plague spreads throughout populations like... well, a plague, with the only escape route being to kill the infected subjects before the disease becomes too widespread.

Pleasing though this multitude of new effects may be, some may argue that they've just been chucked in in a rather cynical attempt to make it seem like there's more to the game. Well they can shut right up, because Populous II differs from the original not just in terms of the sheer number of effects, but also in the whole way in which they behave. As a result, the whole effects side of the game is now a much more involving and tactical affair. Whereas in Populous an effect was cast and that was that, in Populous II each separate effect has a hidden depth, or side-effect. Take the trees for example - lovely green foliage, make the area pleasant to look at and make everybody happy. How could something as innocuous as that possibly have a down side? Unfortunately it does - a rather serious one. Should the opposing deity hit a tree-lined area with a fire effect, the entire vicinity will be set ablaze as the flames spread from tree to tree in a horrendous forest fire that destroys everything nearby. Players can exploit this to their advantage, planting trees in the enemy's territory then setting them alight. There are scores of interdependent effects and dirty tricks hiding within Populous II - it just takes a vindictive mentality and a lot of experimentation to find them.

When it comes to looking at Populous II critically, it's obvious that pretty much all of the praise heaped on the original game belongs here also. After all, it's the same game at heart and all the same plus points apply accordingly. Unlike most previous strategy products, the Populous games succeed by pitting two players together simultaneously - no "your turn, my turn" nonsense here. Also, the feeling of involvement is enhanced considerably by the fact that everything happens directly in front of the player's eyes in extreme detail. What Bullfrog have achieved so admirably with this sequel is, by adding so many new features, tweaks and gameplay enhancements while retaining the original's basic formula, Populous II feels like the original game on one side of the coin, but seems like a totally new and challenging experience on the other.

Amiga version

There's no doubt that Populous II astounds aesthetically, with a level of graphical sophistication and array of sampled sound effects that puts the original game to shame. Unfortunately there's a price for all this fancy frippery - 1024 kilobytes of memory precisely. Owners of half-meg machines will have to wait for a special version, featuring cut-down animation and SFX, to be released in the new year.

ST version

ST owners can look forward to a version of Populous II which is virtually identical to the Amiga, bar some slight discrepancies in the sound department. The same 512k/1Mb conditions apply, with the bells-and-whistles 1040 version out at the same time as the Amiga, just before Christmas. A trimmed-down 520 version (for those poor souls who still haven't got a 1Mb machine) will be released in the new year.

PC version

PC Populous II promises to be the best version of the lot! All sorts of lovely extra features are being bolted on to make use of the machine's superior facilities, including a networking option and a special split-screen mode, using super hi-res graphics which will allow two people to play head-to-head on one machine! Supporting all graphics cards from EGA upwards, Populous II also promises an excellent sound mode, supporting the top two sound cards simultaneously, with the Roland handling the theme music while Adlib does the sound effects! Smart. Look out for Populous II around Easter time.

Not a single thing has been put in Populous II just for the sake of it - every feature and effect has its part to play, and the way in which effects actually react with one another makes for an even more engaging and strategic experience. About an hour's play is all it takes to get some idea of how mind-bogglingly clever the game is - much more so than any of the other so-called "God sims" which have been crawling out of the woodwork lately. It's quite ironic that the sequel to the game that started this whole sub-genre should turn up now, just when games like Utopia and Mega lo Mania are receiv-

I NEED A HERO...

No, we're not talking about the crap aftershave. In the case of Populous II, Heroes refer to the all-new Knights, which were one of the more enjoyable features in the original. Now the fun has been increased sixfold, with a different hero, each a character from Greek mythology, for each effect group. Like the Knights, their task is to venture into enemy territory and cause as much trouble for the opposing deity as possible - although each one goes about the task in their own inimitable fashion. A nice touch is that each hero is immune to the effects within his own group. So if Odysseus, the Air hero, is hit by a lightning bolt (which is an Air effect), he will shrug it off without a second thought. Players who notice an opponent's hero storming across the land towards them should bear this in mind when searching for something to attack them with...

PERSEUS (People)

A true hero if ever there was one. Perseus was the one that rode around on Pegasus and slew the evil Medusa. In Populous II, however, he's a maniacal assassin who roams around the landscape chopping the hell out of everyone he sees. He's most similar to the original game's Knights, as he has no particular special powers or attributes.

ADONIS (Vegetation)

Don't let appearances deceive you - this pretty boy is in fact a right menace. Every time he wins a battle, he splits into two, with each new Adonis being half the strength of the original. Obviously this kind of multiplication can lead to rather dizzying numbers of Adonises roaming about. It all works out rather nicely though, as later generations are so weak they are killed off easily.

HELEN OF TROY (Water)

Helen acts like the old Sirens of Greek mythology, who attracted men to their deaths with their melodious singing. Wherever she walks, members of the opposing tribe are inextricably drawn towards her. As she continues to roam the landscape, she amasses a veritable convoy of lovestruck admirers. Then she heads for the nearest beach and jumps into the sea - and her army of fanatic followers plunge in after her like lemmings.

HERACLES (Earth)

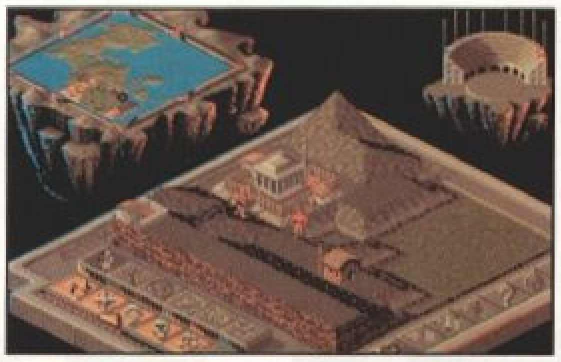
The thing about Heracles is that he's just so incredibly HARD! Normally, you pump a load of people into the papal magnet, then transform them and the resultant hero is equal to their combined strength. Heracles, however is TWICE as strong as the combined strength, so if you put in a hundred men, you get a hero with the strength of TWO hundred! Needless to say, Heracles can put it about a bit, so he is the best choice for all-round carnage.

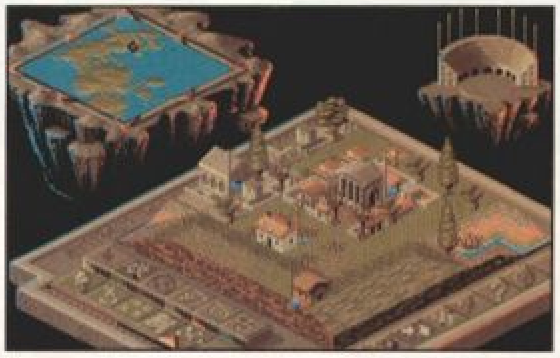
ACHILLES (Fire)

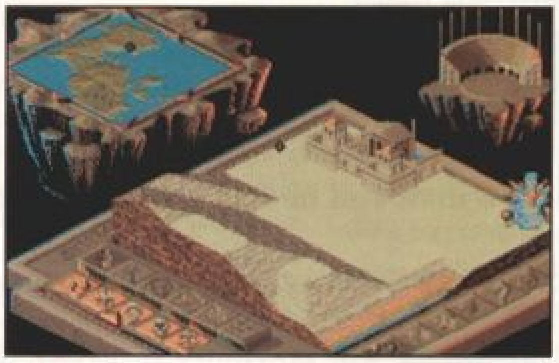
Though he may have a gammy foot, Achilles knows his stuff when it comes to wholesale destruction. Like the assassins, he likes to wander about looking for trouble. He's not a fighter though, concentrating instead on property damage. An expert arsonist, Achilles will put the torch to anything he can lay his hands on - including entire villages and forests.

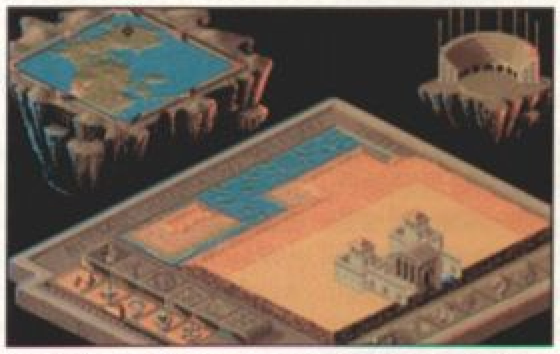
ODYSSEUS (Air)

When fighting, Odysseus is almost identical to Perseus - the difference is that he can travel like the wind, at incredible speeds. At full pelt, Odysseus can get from one end of the landscape to the other in a mere 15 seconds! As such, Odysseus comes in handy when you need to lower the enemy's population very quickly indeed.









As well as the conventional green pastures, Populous II challenges the player with three other types of terrain. Fans of the original will remember the Ice and Desert worlds, but Sludge, with its marshy land and horribly slimy oceans is an all-new creation. The type of landscape slightly changes the way in which people behave, and the player should alter his tactics accordingly.

(Far left, top) When a battle is won, the entire game is played back in miniature in this elaborate throne room.. A two-hour game can be replayed in 20 seconds! When that's over, the defeated deity doles out the all-important experience points, depending on the player's performance.

ing so much praise, and put them all in their place by showing what this sort of game is really all about. How it really should be done. Not since the original Populous has a game been so engaging strategically, so easy to get into and, above all, so much fun to play.

Though it would be pretty sad to have to fall back on hackneyed superlatives like "awesome", "incredible" and "fantastic", all three are genuinely true of Populous II. For once, words really do fail me - which is a bit of a first for poncy gits like us who think we know everything. It doesn't matter anyway as there's not really that much left to say, apart from that Populous II is the best 16-bit computer game that I've ever seen. Simple as that, really.

● **Gary Whitta**

ACE TrailBlazer

RATINGS

Incredible array of new features and effects. More sophisticatedgraphical presentation Retains the graphic feel of the original.	For 1Mb players only

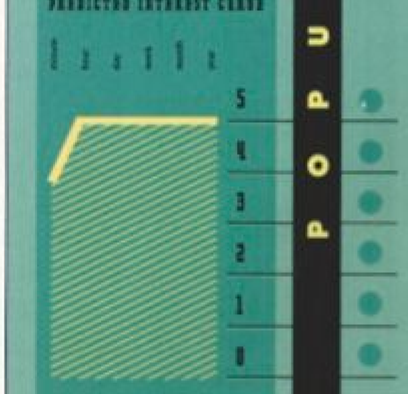
985 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
9	7	8	10

What's most immediately impressive about Populous II is that, despite the fact that it's twice as complex and involving as the original game, it's every bit as easy to get into and learn, due to its more sophisticated icon and control system. The way in which the game's levels control the player's progress (with experience points and new effects becoming available as the conquest goes on) means there's much more incentive to continue playing, and because there's a defined final goal - ie the defeat of Zeus in the conquest game - the old Populous problem of completing a couple of hundred worlds and getting bored has been done away with. The two-player mode is as excellent as ever and this, combined with the custom game option, which can generate thousands of landscapes to play on and the wealth of player-definable game options means that Populous II is unlikely to lose its appeal even long after the main game has been completed.

POPULOUS II

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



Genre Arcade Blast
Publisher Core Design
Developer In-house
Price £25.99

WOLFCHILD

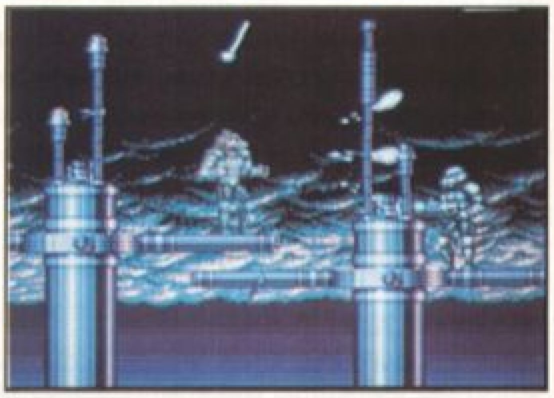
There was a man and he had a son. The man, Kal Morrow, became one of the world's most brilliant genetic scientists while his son, Saul, grew to become a great athlete. But Morrow's research, into the possibility of splicing the genes of a human and animal to create a hybrid super-being, was to have grave consequences. A shadowy organisation by the name of Chimera, also involved in genetic research for military purposes, heard of the progress that Morrow was making and kidnapped him from his isolated mountaintop laboratory. Now, held prisoner and forced to do Chimera's dirty work, Morrow is creating for them a half-man half-beast ultimate warrior, combining the intelligence of the human mind with the keen killer instincts of the animal. When unleashed upon an unsuspecting world, these slavering mutants will enable Chimera to take over the world.

Unless...

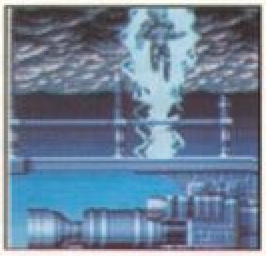
Saul, grief-stricken by the abduction of his father and bent on revenge, sits at his father's console in the abandoned laboratory, when his gaze falls upon the machine. The prototype pod built by Kal just before his kidnapping. The machine that - theoretically - will transform a normal human into an awesome creature that just might have the strength, courage and agility to fight through Chimera's defences and rescue Kal Morrow. So, stepping into the pod, Saul flicks a switch, there's a blinding flash of light and... enter the Wolfchild.

It's with this rather elaborate scenario - as relayed by an impressive opening sequence - that the latest platform epic from Rick Dangerous creator Simon Phipps kicks off. Played over five levels and a total of 400-plus screens, Wolfchild is a fast-paced action extravaganza that mixes pixel-perfect platform-game dexterity with traditional shoot'em-up action in the same way as CapCom's coin-op classic Strider.

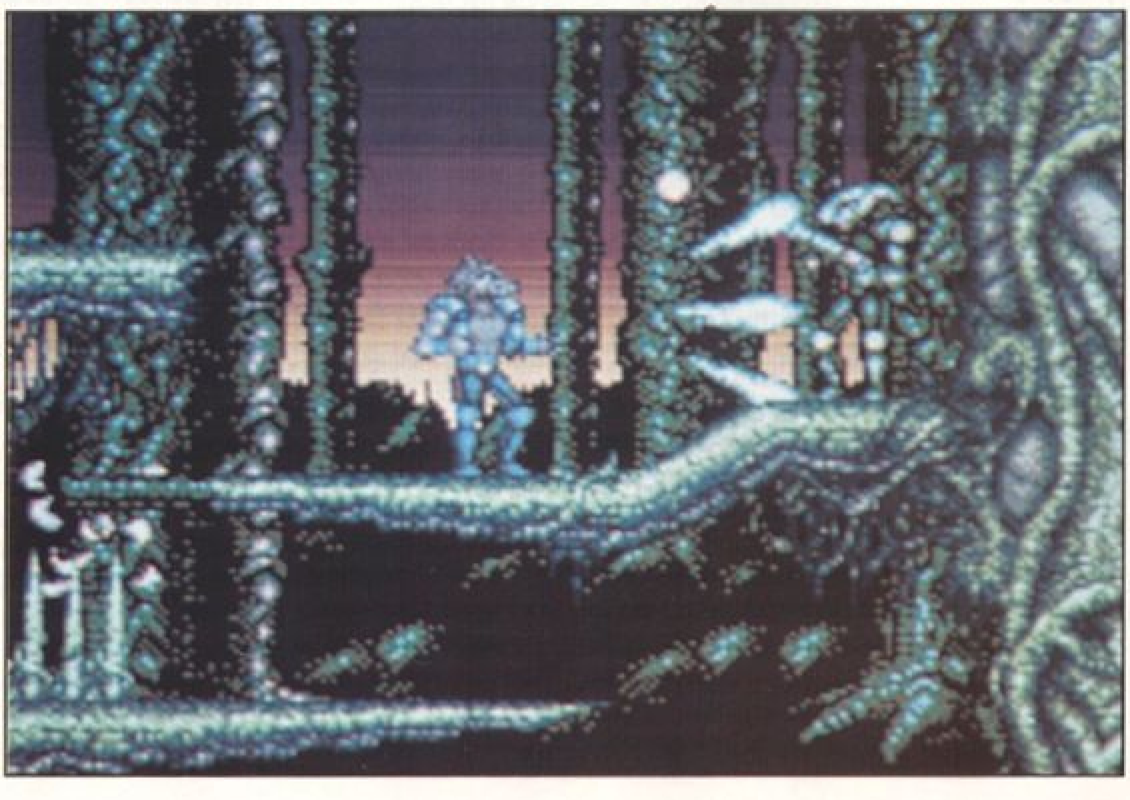
To tell the truth, Wolfchild offers nothing particularly earth-shattering or innovative in the design stakes - apart from the central transmutation twist



(Above) When armed with the Three-Way Shot, Wolfchild's chances are greatly increased, as he can attack enemies above and below him, as well as directly in front.



(Left) A blinding column of electrical energy, similar to the one that accompanies the human-to-wolf transformation sequence, beams Saul into the start of each new level.



- but that's a point which quickly pales into insignificance as soon as the simple, no-frills gameplay grips the player. At once a nifty retelling of the classic Wolfman story and enjoyable platform outing, Wolfchild boasts playability, smartness of design and sheer, unadulterated mayhem that knocks the likes of Switchblade II into a cocked hat. And then some.

On each of the five levels, the player's quest is simple - from the beam-in point at one corner of the map, leap and fight through the tortuously-constructed maze of platforms to where the end-of-level guardian awaits for the scrap which will either end the game or lead to the next stage. It's the presence of a veritable legion of enemies, all out to halt the player's progress, that put a more interesting slant on things and give the game its more frenetic, arcade-style elements. Footsoldiers track the player along platforms, blasting away, while others man giant rotating cannons, conduct strafing runs from fast-flying hang-gliders or otherwise make use of the landscape in order to slow him down. The specific nature of the threat differs from level to level, as the adversaries are themed - something the storyline rather handily allows for.

Simon Phipps' nifty reworking of the classic Wolfman story boasts playability, smartness of design and sheer unadulterated mayhem that knocks the likes of Switchblade II into a cocked hat. And then some.

We're told that the enemies the player comes up against are the genetic experiments pumped out by Chimera, and a specific breed has been designated to guard each stage - so on the first level the threat is posed by birdmen, while on Level Two the player comes up against a variety of lizard beasts. Level Three is protected by all manner of insect warriors and so on until the player reaches the actual Chimera laboratories and is accosted by a bizarre mish-mash of half-finished mutants and failed experiments which burst forth from their incubator vats. Not a pretty sight.

It's the central "wolfman" element itself, however, which gives the game its most interesting gameplay twist. The player begins his quest as the human character Saul, who has only the most mundane of abilities - run, jump and a punch that can dispatch most opponents within striking range. Due to some genetic trickery, Saul's wolfen side can only be triggered when his energy level reaches a specified point. When enough energy-boosting podules are collected to push him past that critical level, a column of electricity beams down from out of the sky and transforms him into Wolfchild - a half man, half wolf hybrid which, though identical in terms of how the character actually moves, is blessed with a number of extra attributes. The most notable - and useful - genetic enhancement is the ability to conjure up bolts on electrical energy and fire them, like bullets, at the enemy. The punch move is disbanded to make way for this significantly more deadly technique, which allows Wolfchild to take out foes at long distance and, with the relevant power-ups collected, to attack in a wide variety of interesting - and lethal - ways (see POWER UP!).

As well as this new-found electrical ability, Saul's wolfen form also allows him to jump ever-so slightly further - useful in situations where pixel-perfect accuracy might otherwise be required - and, on later stages, to break open blocks and barriers that lead to further parts of the level. As Wolfchild, Saul is a considerably more formidable opponent - mainly because of the weapons, which really are very hard indeed - but it's not altogether easy to stay in K9 form. Nothing changes on the power front - enemy shots take the same toll as before - and if the battering reduces Saul's energy back below the transmutation point, the wolfen form can't be sustained and the becomes the weaker human character once again.

The way in which energy power-ups are littered thoughtfully around the landscape combined with the constant barrage from the roving enemies means that, depending on ability, the player finds himself alternating between the two characters quite regularly - and that, in turn, adds an extra touch of spice to the gameplay, as it means the player has to alter his playing style to make best use of the current character's abilities.

Because Saul can only attack with his close-range punch, a whole different set of tactics are required for him than Wolfchild, who can attack targets across the screen with his energy orbs. Careful, stealthy play is much more important for Saul, not just because of his diminished attacking ability, but also because being human means the player must have less than 50% energy - and is therefore closer to death. Whenever the player's character is human, finding the energy pods that will change him into the wolf

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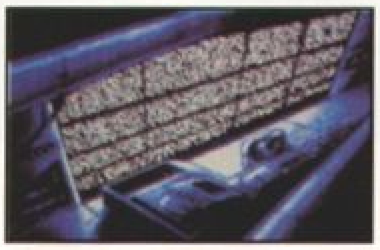
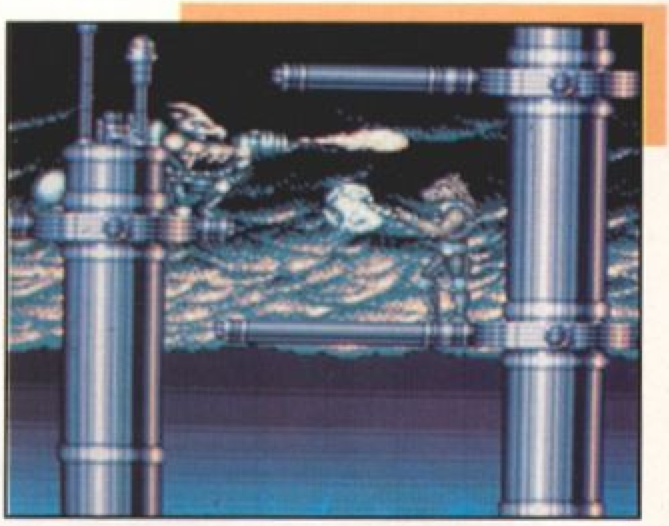
Upon loading, the player is presented with a cinematic opening sequence which tells the story. First the Wolfchild logo scratches itself across the screen and we pan down from a star-lit sky...

...to Kai Morrow's genetic laboratory, situated on the summitof a snow-capped mountain.

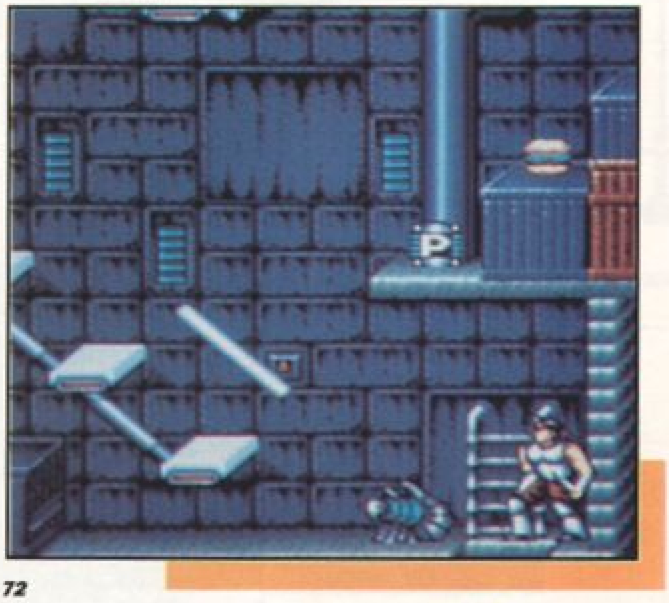


Inside, Kai's abandoned son Saul sits slumped at his father's desk, the giant bank of video monitors crackling quietly behind him. Then he looks up and sees the mutation pod and the rest is history...



compare & contrast

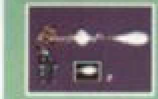
Ironic, really, that we should end up comparing Wolfchild to the sequel to one of Simon Phipps' earlier platform efforts. Switchblade II, which was basically a bigger and chunkier version of the top-notch original, is similar to Wolfchild in many respects - the combination of platforms and hard-nosed combat, the fast eight-way scrolling, the sloping platforms, the dirty tricks and traps. But while Switchblade II is undoubtedly an accomplished and fully paid-up member of the genre, Wolfchild beats it on grounds of sheer class. For a start it's faster, and the combat aspect enhances the action rather than inhibiting it - in Switchblade II, fighting the guards seemed to get in the way of the player's progress and ultimately proved annoying. Weapon-wise, Wolfchild emerges the victor once again, boasting more types (eight as opposed to Switchblade's six), which are more impressive to watch. It's not that Switchblade II and Wolfchild are radically different conceptually - Wolfchild is just executed a whole lot better, which is why it gets the gold without hesitation.



POWER UP!

When Saul transforms into Wolfchild, a whole world of high-tech kicking technology opens up to him. Starting off with a simple one-shot plasma thingy, Wolfie can upgrade his hardness by breaking open packing crates and other recepticles dotted around the scenery. But beware! Apart from the default laser, each weapon has only limited ammunition, and when all the shots are expended, it's back to the basic model.

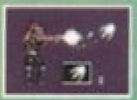
BASIC
This is Wolfchild's standard piece of kit, consisting of just a bog-standard plasma shot that fires straight ahead, terminating when it hits its target.



FLAMER
Acts just like the basic shot, except it's considerably more powerful, like the Beam weapon in R-Type. The smart thing about it is it can cut right through its targets, stopping only when it hits solid scenery. Burning a whole through a line of soldiers is a lot of fun.

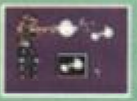
THREE-WAY
Definitely one of the more favoured weapons, the triple shot is another variation on the basic weapon. One shot fires straight ahead, while two others travel out at diagonals. Useful for knocking out targets on a higher or lower platform.

DUAL SHOT
Again, similar to the basic shot, but this time Wolfchild can fire two shots off in quick succession. One to use in particularly heavy situations where many guards may be attacking.



HOMERS
Simple enough, really - they lock on to the nearest alien target and don't give up until they score a hit.

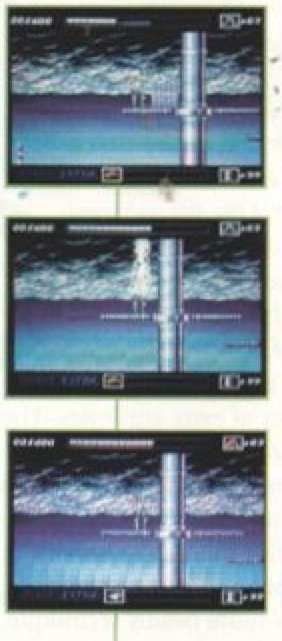
BOOMER
Short for Boomering. This little baby spins out, straight ahead, for a short distance then returns to the player.

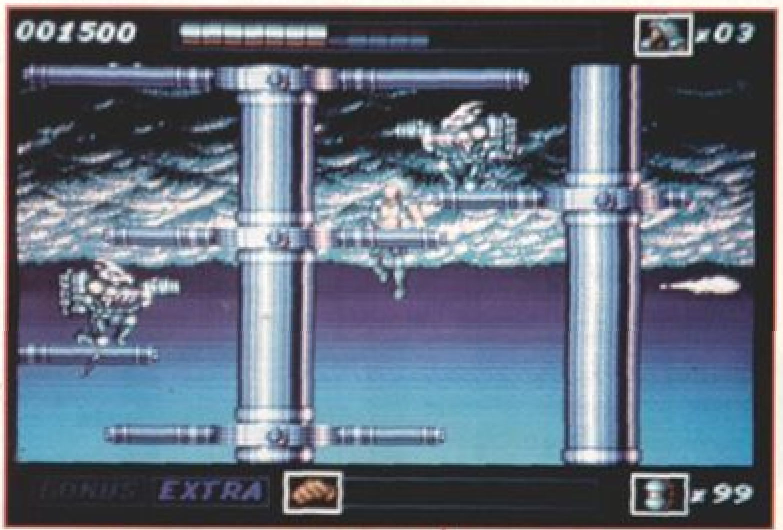


ARC SHOT
This is good. When fired, it travels forward for a short distance then drops downwards like a bomb onto the heads of any guards situated below. Not particularly effective in general combat, though.

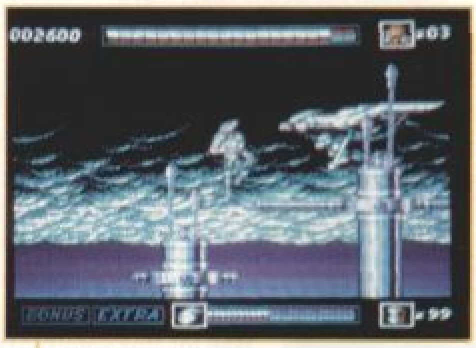
PLASMA BALL
When fired, the Plasma Ball travels slowly forwards, zig-zagging up and down erratically as it moves. When used correctly, it forms a protective shield in front of the player. The ball destroys everythin in its path while Wolfchild walks safely behind it.

A packing crate standing on the last of the ship's giant masts yields an energy pod when Saul punches it open. When collected, it boosts his energy to maximum and the Wolfchild transformation takes place, as this three-shot sequence shows. Owoooooo!



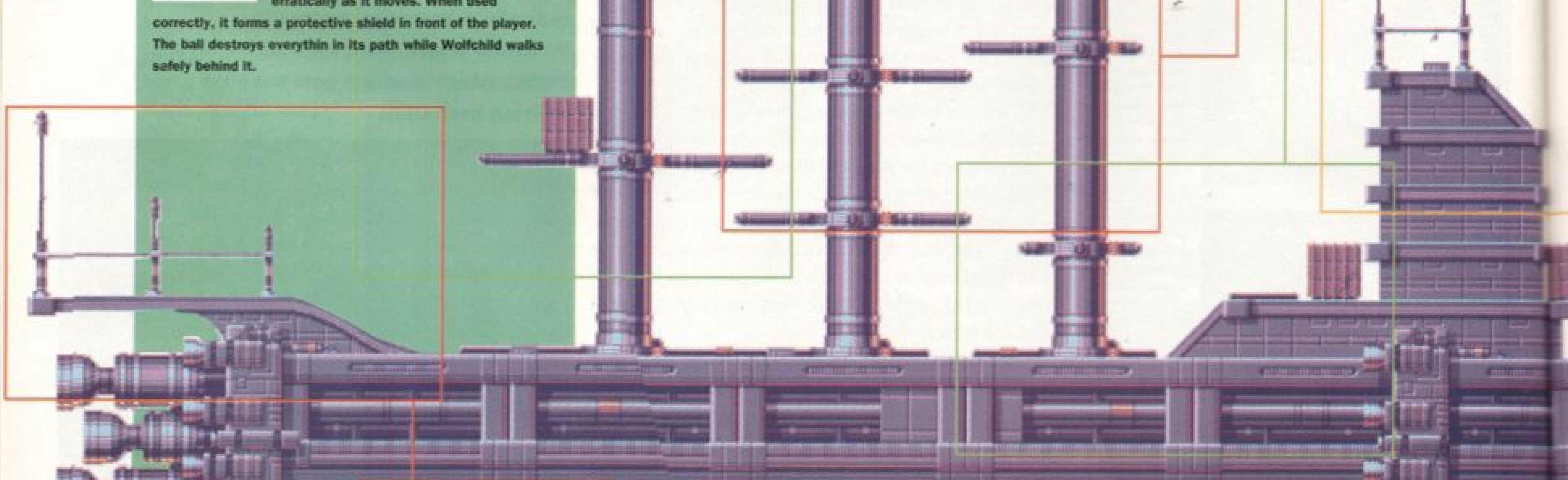


There's trouble for Saul as he begins to climb his way up the galleon's metallic masts. Mutant birdmen fire their laser weapons at him, and all he has to fight back with is a lousy punch! Fortunately, one hit is all it takes.



At the ship's highest point, the hang-gliders attack once again, the first swooping straight past, and the second dropping off a footsoldier.

After battling through the first wave of guards, Saul reaches here, where another soldier and a laser-toting pal guard a crate. See this pair off and smash it open for an energy bonus.



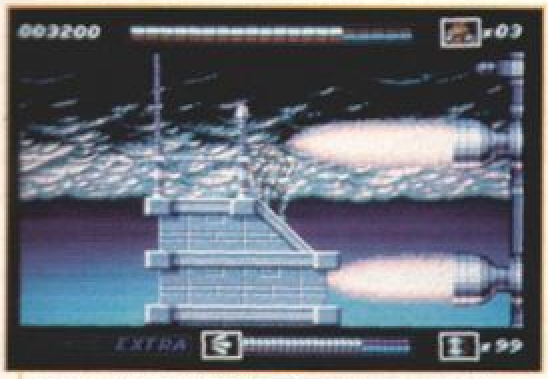
The action begins as Saul is beamed down onto the far end of the ship's deck. Immediately a birdman swoops down to attack on a mechanical hanglider. A quick punch will soon see him off.

Don't run off to the right straight away - instead, walk over to the left to collect a secret bonus.

Set on a giant space galleon, Wolfchild's opening level is only a fraction of the size of those that follow - but it packs in plenty of action, thereby acquainting the player with the game's particular style of mayhem in a short space of time. Queue here please, for the guided tour...

The final challenge. As Wolfchild steps precariously out onto the ship's front pole-thingy, he is accosted by this guant bird guardian. It flaps around, firing off plasma balls intermittently and, as you'd expect, takes multiple shots to kill.

The most effective weapon against this monster is the Flamer, as it inflicts the most damage per shot.

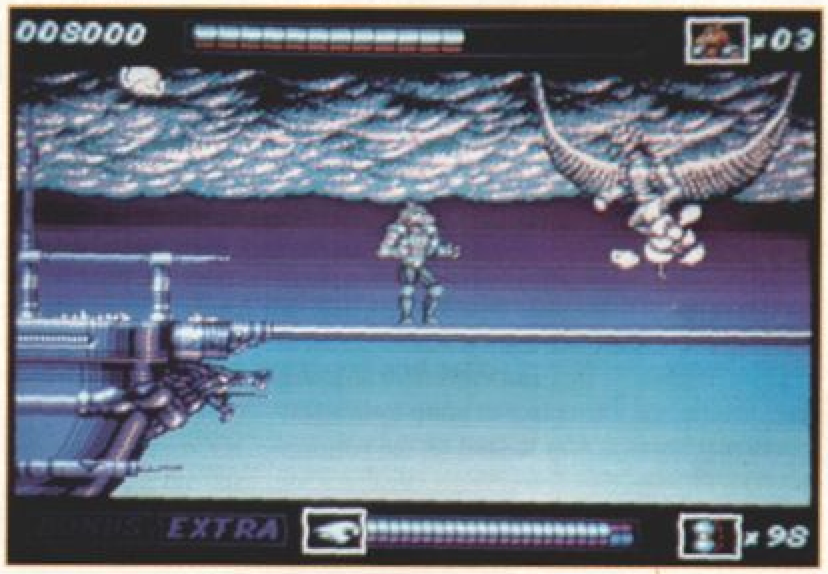


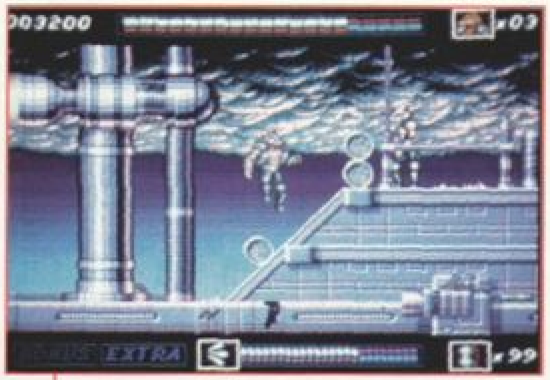
To get past here, Wolfchild must avoid these searing jets of flame. The slidey platform doesn't make things any easier.

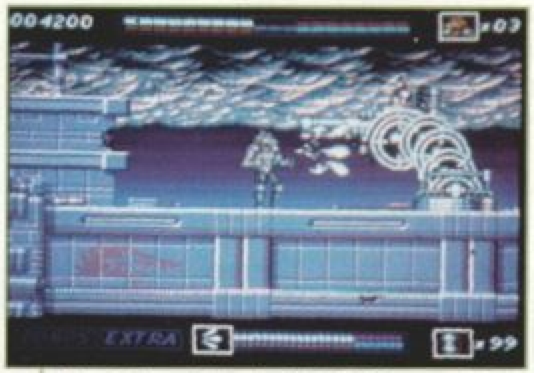
Don't try to get past both flames in one go - they're cynchronised to make this difficult... Get past the first, then wait in the middle and drop down past the second.

When Wolfchild reaches here, he must contend with this irate birdman, who stands at the top of the platform rolling barrels down towards him. The barrel jumping is made more difficult here by the steep gradient you have to traverse at the same time. If Wolfchild takes a barrel hit, he is knocked back down to the bottom. So watch it.

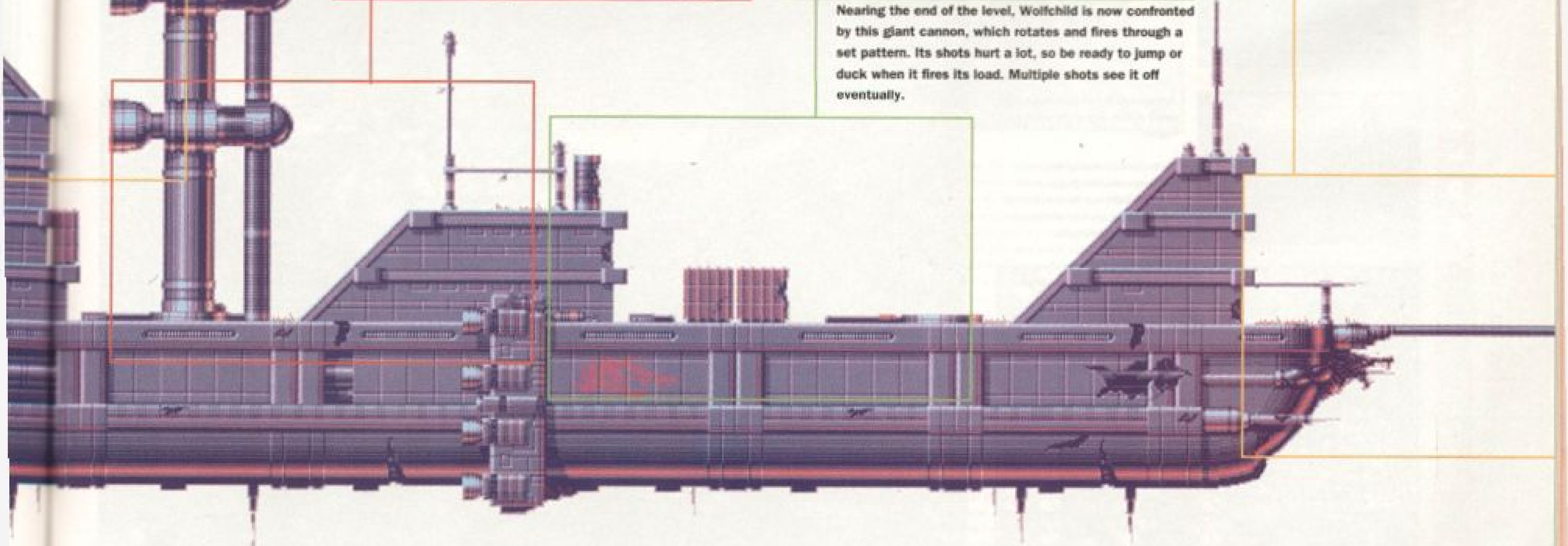
Use the Three-Way shot to take out this guy from below, then run up trouble-free!







Nearing the end of the level, Wolfchild is now confronted by this giant cannon, which rotates and fires through a set pattern. Its shots hurt a lot, so be ready to jump or duck when it fires its load. Multiple shots see it off eventually.



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should always be a top priority -particularly in the closing stages of a level, as the projectile weapons are essential equipment for battling the guardians.

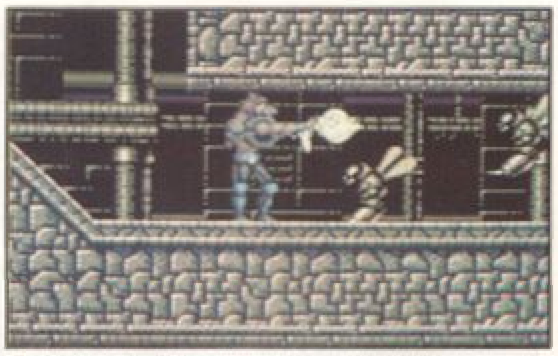
Each level - apart from the first, which is a short and undemanding affair designed to acquaint the player with the ground rules and get him warmed-up for what's to come - is a maze-like affair consisting of around 80 screens - ten wide, eight deep. Though none of the levels are really that labyrinthine, the different drop-in and guardian locations for each one mean that finding your way from one end to the other isn't quite as cut and dried as it may seem. The actual level design is really quite open-plan, affording Saul freedom to explore, looking for craftily-hidden pick-ups, bonuses, short-cuts or secret rooms that are dotted about the scenery, just waiting to be discovered by the more vigilant hero.

Like Phipps' earlier Rick Dangerous, Wolfchild relies heavily on the level design to provide a major part of the game challenge. Platforms and ledges are spaced out so that jumps have to judged and executed with skill, while no end of devious tricks and traps - floating platforms that develop faults and crash to the ground, floors that give way underfoot and all manner of spike traps and carniverous plants are just some of the threats the scenery presents. Learning how to deal with them is more a matter of common sense and trial-and-error than anything else - finding the right place to jump from a fast-falling platform in order to land on the required ledge, for instance. Often, seemingly safe drops will actually land the player on a spike trap, or other malicious device. As the player becomes aware where these devious set-ups lie, the direction of a jump can be changed in mid-air, a la Rick, in order to avoid them. The result on-screen, when a proficient player is in control, is really quite satisfying, as Saul adeptly sneaks and leaps his way around the trap-strewn landscape.

Wolfchild also has no qualms about punishing the player for his own mistakes. Again, it's all down to the physical construction of the levels. If a jump is mistimed or misplaced and the target platform is missed, the player may be sent back quite a way by his fall, and then have to go through a section of the level again in order to get back to the original jump point and have another go. While some may argue that this is a bit harsh, in practice what it seems to do is discipline the player by enforcing such a penalty - you can be sure that the player will be a lot more careful about his second jump attempt after one failure and having to retrace his steps back. Since it doesn't crop up too often, it doesn't frustrate and so the effect is mainly positive.

When Wolfchild's not executing a daring leap across a bottomless chasm or kicking the stuffing out of some genetic reprobate, chances are he's seeking out one of the game's countless bonuses or power-ups. Most can be found generally littering the landscape, while others are concealed within crates that must be smashed open before their booty is revealed. Energy pods are without doubt the most vital collectable, as they hold the key to Saul's gene-swapping activities. In addition there are several helpful bits and bobs, the most sought-after being an energy-extend bar which effectively doubles Saul's energy capacity, allowing him to take more hits and subsequently spend more time in wolfen form.

Also, the player can endeavour to pick up major goodies by collecting all the letters in the words BONUS or EXTRA, which are randomly-dispersed, like the power-up pods, around the level. The first word, when completed increments the score by



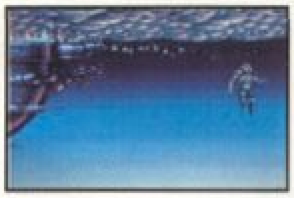
Things hot up on Level Three as Wolfchild comes under attack from a swarm of buzzing insects with deadly stings. He can run away to the left, but that won't improve matters much as there's a giant locust waiting in the wings. Better to stand and fight - especially since he's armed with the well-hard boomerang.

Amiga version

Music and sound has been used well, acting as the aural equivalent of pouring extra atmosphere on with a ladle. The brooding theme tune, which plays over the animated opening sequence, is one of the classiest the Amiga's heard in quite a while, complete with a throbbing Terminator-style backing beat. This, along with all the intro stuff, means a two-disk product - although the minimum of swapping is required, and it all fits nicely into half a meg. Lovely.

ST version

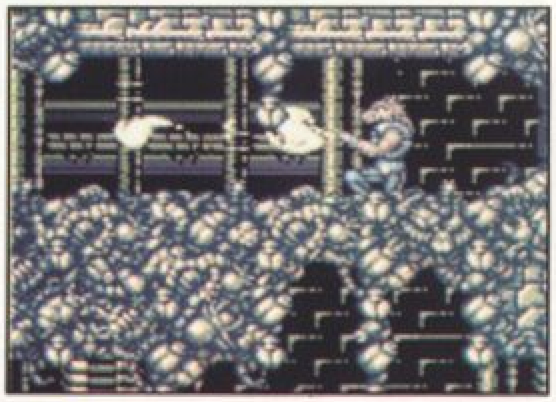
Unfortunately, ST owners don't get the benefit of the Amiga's tasty parallax scrolling, and the music is obviously not quite as hard, but apart from that things remain pretty much the same.

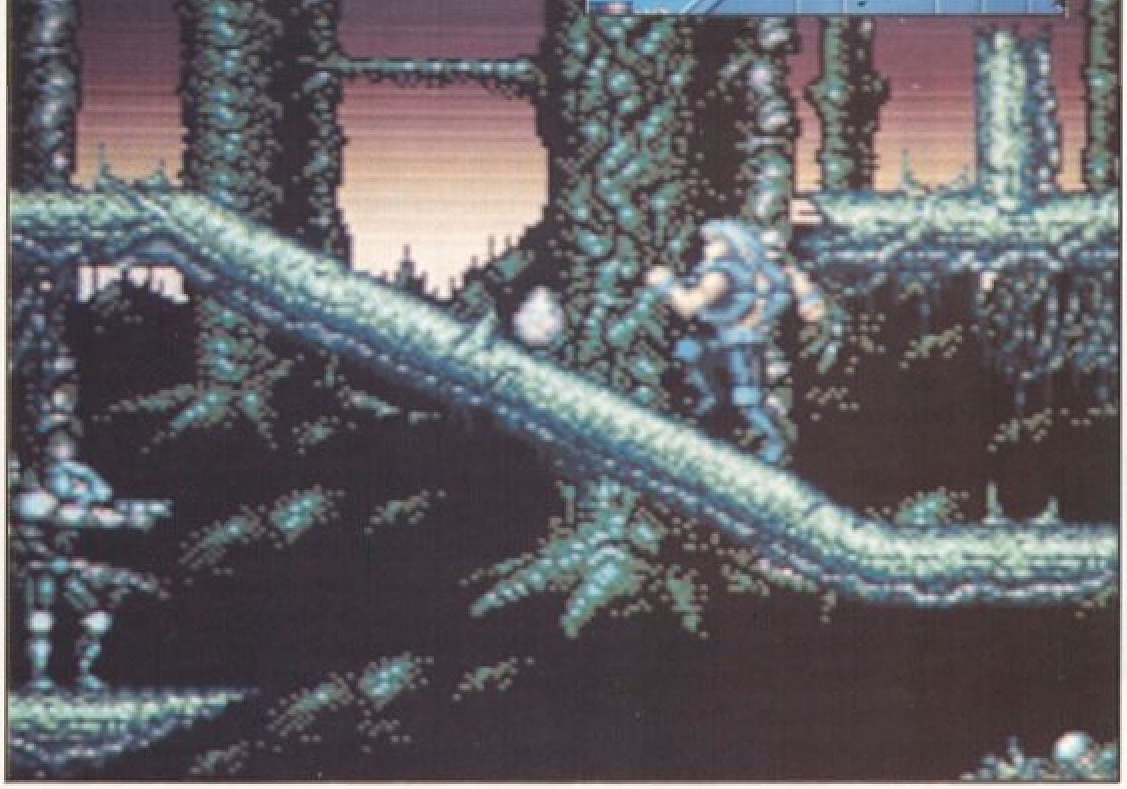


When Wolfchild has defeated the giant bird guardian at the end of the of the first level, the pole thingy he's standing on burns away and he falls...

...down into the densely-vegetated forest below, where the next level begins.

(Left) Once in among the trees and branches, things get much tougher. Look out for the spitting plants, mantraps and all manner of spikes and punji pits.





20,000 points, while the latter gives Saul another life. And as kind of a gameplay side-salad to compliment the main meat of the action, there's no shortage of hidden Mario-style bonuses for the player to seek out. Many are completely invisible, and are only likely to be found by accident, while others are concealed within antechambers that have secret entrances - only the most thorough players are likely to spot these.

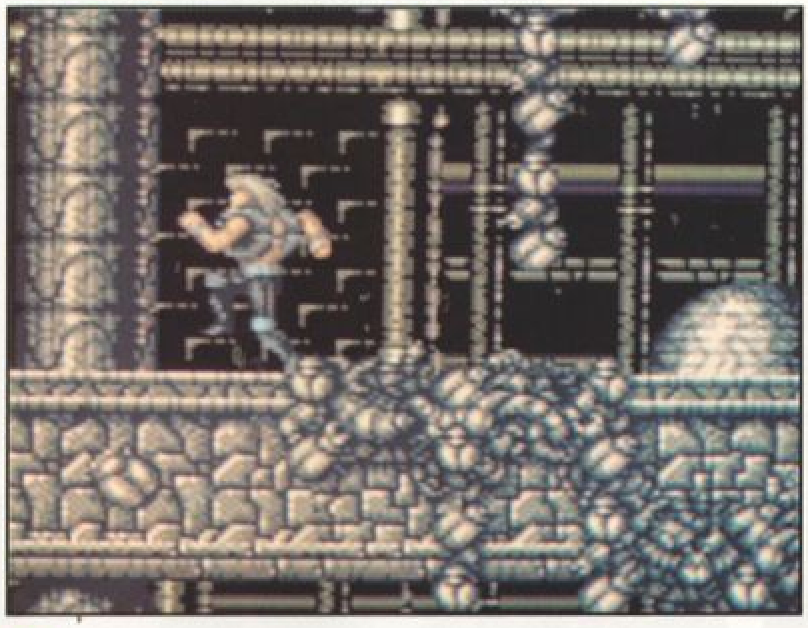
Something that's particularly smart is the way in which the program alters its distribution of collectables depending on the status of the player. Since the wolf-weapon power-ups are no use to Saul in human form, they only appear when the wolf character is active. If a crate containing, say, a Three-Way Shot is punched open by the the human Saul, the pod will appear instead as a points or energy bonus. It's only a small touch and not exactly a masterstroke of game design, but it's an agreeable plus point all the same and symbolic of the care and thoughtfulness that runs through every aspect of the game.

Designer Simon Phipps has been striving for a while now to produce authentic console-style games on computer, and Wolfchild represents his most successful effort yet. Hell, it's THE most successful effort yet. Some people may whinge about the lack of any spectacular innovation in the game, but for my money at least, it's exactly this lack of frippery or poncy messing about that allows the player to get right to the crux of the action and makes the game what it is - a lot of fun to play. It's a whole lot smoother and more comfortable than most that's to be found in the current arcade-game scene, and it's presented so nicely, with oodles of neat little touches and ease of control that it's a real "feel-good" game. It's simple, instinctive, but there's lots of scope for advanced skills and the hidden depths are there for the players who want to find them. But if any one thing has to be cited for making Wolfchild so enjoyable and ultimately compulsive is the sheer speed at which things happen - the constant enemy assaults force the player to keep moving, which ensures a fast-paced game, and the combination of traditional platform-game running and jumping with hard-nosed arcade blasting works even more effectively than in the Switchblade games. It's a rare occasion when the action lets up, and the gorgeous animation, particularly on the weapons and associated pyrotechnics guarantees a visual feast.

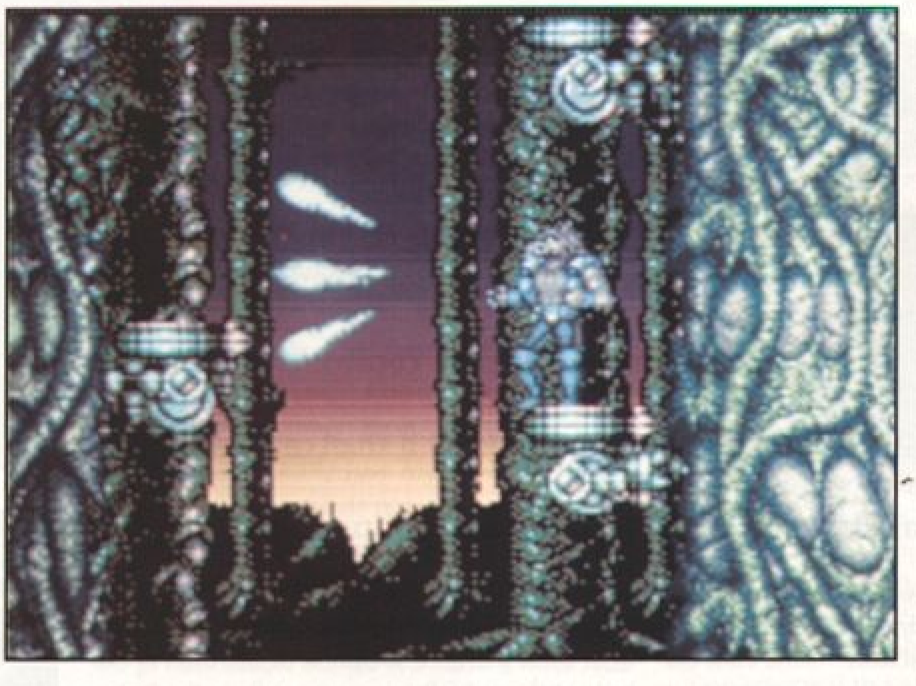
If there's a criticism, it's that maybe more could have been made of the central character. For a game so obviously inspired, at least in part, by Strider, there aren't quite enough of that game's impressive acrobatics - some swinging and somersaulting action might have elevated the game into something really spectacular and stunning. That minor omission, however, shouldn't put anyone off this excellent slice of arcade action. It really is too good to miss - so don't.

● **Gary Whitt**

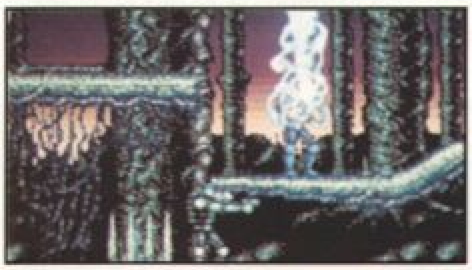
Level Three is real shivers-down-the-spine stuff. It has an insectoid theme, and the background, consisting of all kinds of cocoon and insect nests, has been animated in a superbly squirmy fashion to give a horrible maggot-y feel. Uuurgh! To add to the claustrophobia, the actual level design, while just as large as the others, is a lot more cramped, comprising narrow walkways and places where the landscape seems to close in around the player. The aliens are of course all suitably insectoid, with giant locusts, flies, wasps and a few horrible mutations which aren't very nice at all.



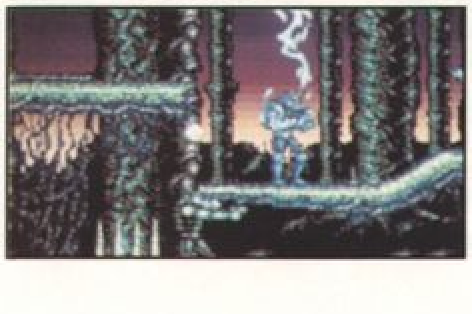
Wolfchild's most impressive aspect is the sheer speed at which things happen. It's a rare occasion when the action lets up, and the gorgeous animation, particularly on the weapons and associated pyrotechnics, guarantees a visual feast.



(Above) The only way for Saul to progress in Level Two is use the giant trees which provide all the platforms and footholds. Watch where you put your feet, though - some branches are weaker than others and prone to give way when stepped on. Trees are hollowed out at certain points and are often the only way through - the way they are situated forces the player to work all the way around the scenery, travelling up one tree, down the other and so on through the level.



(Left) Things getting too hot for the weaponless Saul? No problemo! Just pick up that energy pod and down comes that beam of electricity...



...Bingo! When the smoke clears, those reptilian vagabonds now have a much tougher opponent in the form of the snarling wolfchild. This transformation is accompanied byan impressive sampled howl - taken from An American Werewolf in London, in fact. Coo...

RATINGS

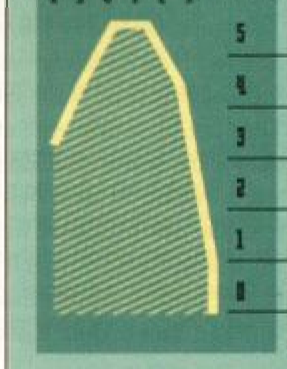
WOLFCHILD RATINGS

👍	👎
Superb speed and feel. Lovely animation. Plenty of kicking-in.	Are five levels enough?

905 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
8	4	7	9

Wolfchild's difficulty curve is well graded, with a particularly nice touch at the start of the game. The first level, a big space galleon, is only about an eight of the size of the levels that follow, and is designed simply to get the player off on the right foot. Because it's quite easy to complete, it means the player gets a sense of achievement early on, which enhances the enthusiasm for what's to come. Too many games make the stake of alienating the player early on by getting too hard too quickly, and Wolfchild leaps this hurdle with aplomb. The fourth level is actually double the normal size, at an enormous 160 screens - a little spanner in the works for anybody who get cocky. Because there are only five levels, though, I'm unsure how much challenge the game may present to experienced platformers. The many extra elements that appear as the game progresses add to the overall challenge, but there's unlikely to be any compulsion to return once the game is completed. Not that that's much of a crime - how many completed games do you still play?



Genre Role Playing Game
Publisher Strategic Simulations, Inc./US Gold
Developer Westwood Associates
Price £34.99

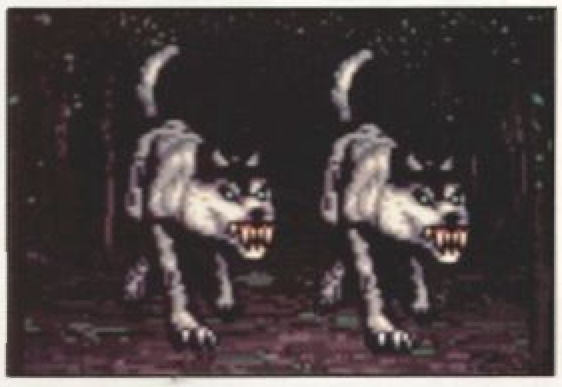
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

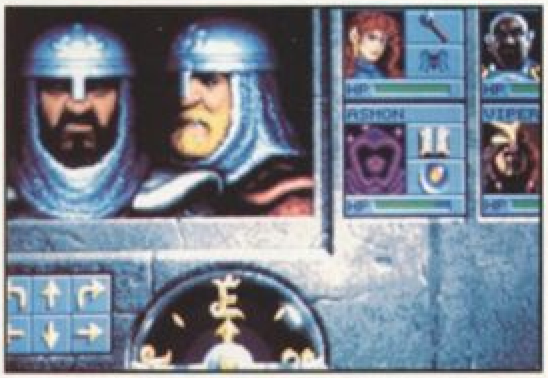
Suddenly the carved wooden door grinds shut with a deafening crash. Our three bold adventurers turn to confront a garrison of unsightly skeletal soldiers thirsting for fresh blood. "I'll shall cast these fools asunder with the feared Sundabar curse!", shouts Akrain of Ruathym. But before the crabby mage can open his aging but perfectly bound spellbook, Cedric the Warrior rushes forward with customary brashness. "Stand aside old man, my mighty sword forged from the white heat of dragon breath and the steel of Shef-Field shall banish these intruders back to whence they came! Only I, elf prince from the mysterious forest of tremendous undergrowth am destined to lead us in these dark days...

Enough! Only very sad people gain any pleasure from such orctastic adventures, right? You know the kind of part time train-spotter I'm talking about. They can be seen every Saturday morning queuing outside the nearest Forbidden Planet or Virgin Games store, itching to hand over their life savings for an essential new handbook with facts and figures revealing the loudness of a troll's bottom burp and what sort of mead hobbits drink when feasting on spicy Chicken Tikka. Until Eye of the Beholder, the typical SSI release was strictly reserved for spotty kids with greasy hair and anoraks to match. Sure, titles like Pool of Radiance and Curse of the Azure Bonds had a dedicated following, especially in the States, but the problem was they just looked so bloody dull.

This is the point where one normally hears whining along the lines of: 'You don't need fancy graphics to make a good game'. Yeah, and Terminator 2 would have been a far more enjoyable movie if the special effects team had used soggy cardboard instead of ground-breaking computer graphics.

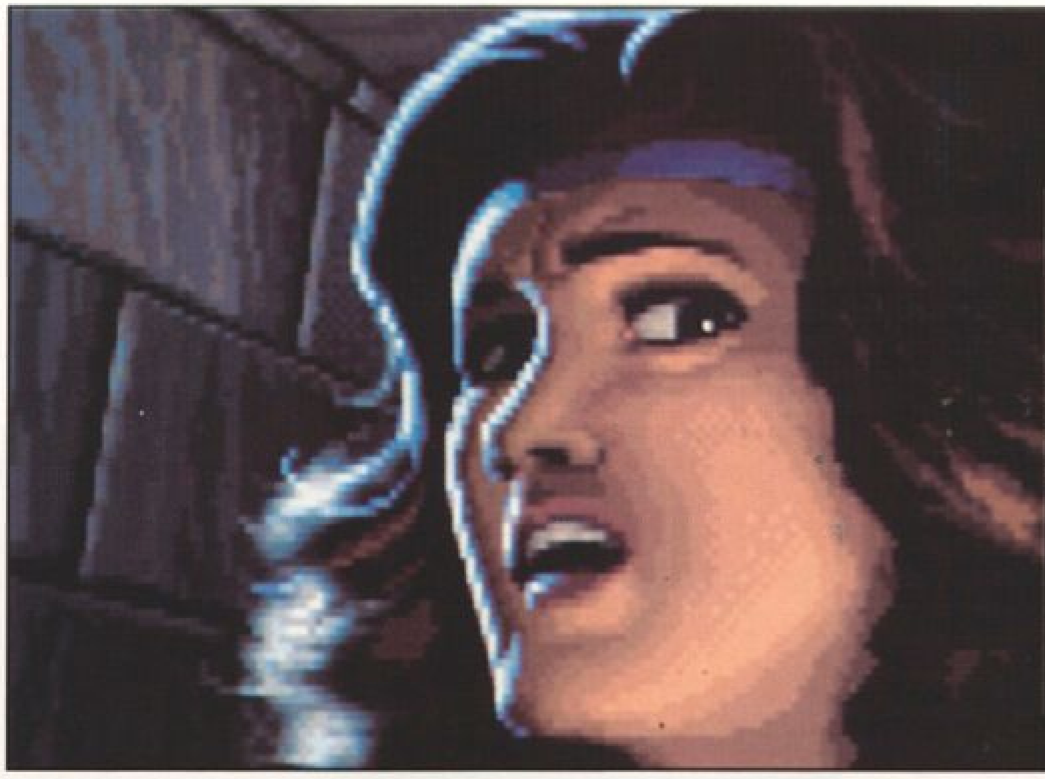
No, the average gamester wants plenty of absorbing play coupled with top quality visuals, sound effects and music. And, thankfully, somebody on the original Eye of the Beholder project saw the potential in these ingredients. It seemed a talented artist had been employed for the first time, and, on top of that, a cheeky pro-



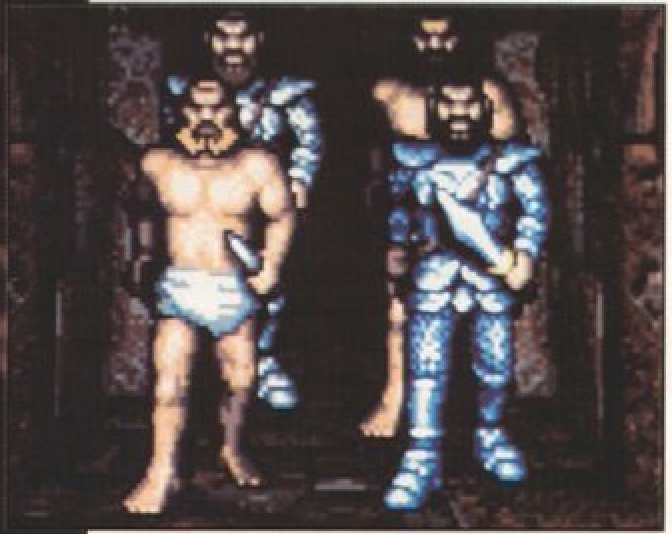


Until Eye of the Beholder, the typical SSI release was strictly reserved for spotty kids with greasy hair and anoraks to match

As you can see from the screenshots above, Eye of the Beholder II looks even better than its pretty predecessor. Of course, these are glorious 256-colour VGA graphics running on a PC but Strategic Simulations, Inc. and Westwood Associates did a superb job converting the original game over to the Amiga.



This comely wench is Ira, a female fighter who greets your party of brave adventurers at the entrance of Temple Dark Moon where it meets the forest. Apparently, her sister Calandra has gone missing and Ira believes she is being held captive somewhere within these dark and dangerous dungeons. As far as the gameplayer is concerned, this is one of those transitional bits of Beholder II which reveal more of the plot and some of the intrigue. A few words of warning! Beware of the two clerics who are also found at this impressive doorway. These blaggards have a few nasty tricks up their sleeves...



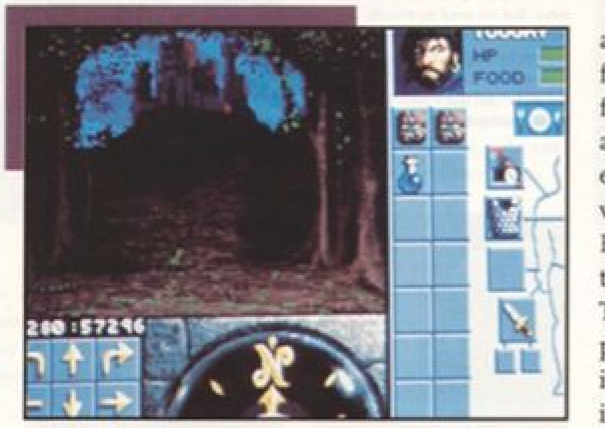
grammer dared to bring arcade action to the proceedings. By taking a fair bit of inspiration from the best-selling Dungeon Master and mixing it all together, SSI had stumbled upon a winner with mass appeal.

Based in Sunnyvale in California, SSI is renowned for producing more sequels than the makers of Nightmare on Elm Street. Instead of just milking the product until the formula runs dry, the company has tried to inject some software steroids to expand the experience. And Eye of the Beholder II is the result.

In case you've never played the first release, or any other role playing game of a similar nature, here's a brief rundown. The basic core of the venture is a multitude of mazes set, naturally enough, in murky dungeons filled with deadly pitfalls and creatures who need slaying on sight. This fantasy world is seen from first-person perspective and can be manipulated via an easy-to-use point'n'click interface. Anything that appears in the 3D representation of your surroundings normally proves useful somewhere along the line. Items can be scooped up, like potions for healing wounds and armour for extra protection, while keys or release levers open doors. The idea is to experiment with everything found in the environment.

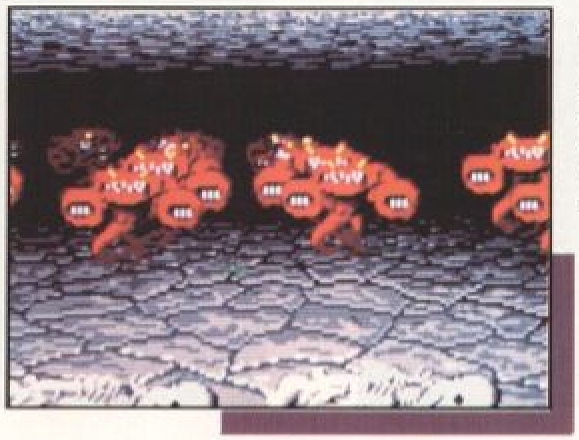
You're controlling a party of four brave and sturdy adventurers made up of any combination of humans, mages, halflings, thieves, elves and so forth. It shouldn't take a genius to guess thieves are good at picking locks, dwarves are short and have brilliant eyesight underground, fighters are tough and clerics can provide powerful healing and protective spells. Each of these characters has their own strengths and weaknesses which need to be exploited and overcome to succeed in your quest.

Physical positioning within the party also makes a difference. Those in the front are able to attack with weapons such as swords and axes, while characters in the rear ranks may employ sneaky spells or ranged armaments like bows and spears. Such attention to detail goes much further though. Paladins, for instance, will not join parties containing any evil folk. Alignment is the philosophy by which a character will live and deal with the world. Using the example of a paladin, they're obviously Lawful Good whereas you could have characters who are Neutral, Evil or Chaotic. The latter selection simply means this person will look after number one above all else. There are also classic RPG ability scores like hit points, strength, charisma, intelligence and dexterity. The designers have thoughtfully provided a modify feature which allows you to selectively change these attributes to match your favourite Advanced Dungeons & Dragons persona.



compare & contrast

Mirrorsoft and FTL started these fantasy shoot'em-up larks with Dungeon Master, then several years later, SSI surpassed this influential role playing game with Eye of the Beholder. Now, we have a sequel that's really just more of the same. Okay, the game itself is much larger and harder to beat but the style of gameplay, presentation, and even the interface remain essentially identical to its respected predecessor. So, do we have a new ACE Benchmark? Erm, by the whisker of a hell hound, that's affirmative.



Eye of the Beholder fans should breathe a sigh of relief because they can transfer their best characters, potions and scrolls from the first game.

On a purely aesthetic note, portraits are chosen to distinguish between each individual. In addition to the four regular members of your party, up to two more non-player characters can join at a time. Lots more people can act as bonus teamsters under your temporary command in Eye of the Beholder II. Many of these strangers provide important information. However, the party will never know, until it's too late, who they can really trust.

Don't worry if this all seems a little too complicated for your tastes. You'll quickly forget there's a complex system of AD&D rules lurking beneath the surface. This is perhaps the real joy of playing either one of the Beholder titles. In fact, the sequel has benefited from a few tweaks here and there to smooth any rough edges. It's easy to see why this is the best of the genre so far. One slip, either in combat or conversation, can bring the whole force of the enemy against you.

This game, subtitled Legend of Dark Moon, picks up where the first game ended. Your party starts out as experienced heroes sent by Khelban Blackstaff, wizard advisor to the Lords of Waterdeep, to investigate evil forces said to be on the march north of the city. The party discovers an area of dark forest

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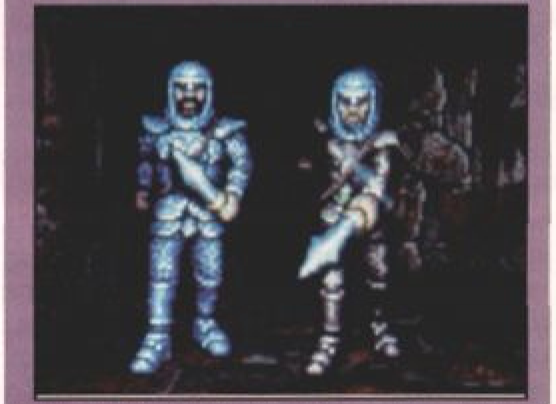
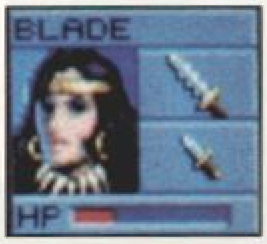
EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

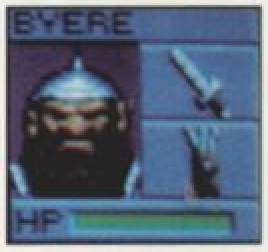
MORE THAN MEETS THE EYE...

After introducing the original Dungeons & Dragons concept back in the 1970's, TSR has made a tidy fortune out of numerous books, graphic novels, board-games and, more recently in connection with SSI, computer games. Eye of the Beholder II is based around the Forgotten Realms scenario in the immensely successful Advanced Dungeons & Dragons saga. Fantasy freaks out there will no doubt be pleased to hear the game complies to Second Edition Rules, which means, for example, that a Bag of Devouring is ninety percent likely to ignore any intrusions while Gauntlets of Dexterity increase overall Dexterity by four points if the wearer's Dexterity is six or less. Er, quite! Thank heavens you can bypass the hassle of reading a massive Dungeon Master's Guide, calculating Magical Item Tables or constantly throwing dice to decide such matters. Thus, without having to worry about using pen and paper to keep track of everything that's happening, players are free to enjoy a compelling plot and encounter characters rich in detail. Alternatively, they can just go through those dingy dungeons and beat-up nasty beasties. Neat, eh?

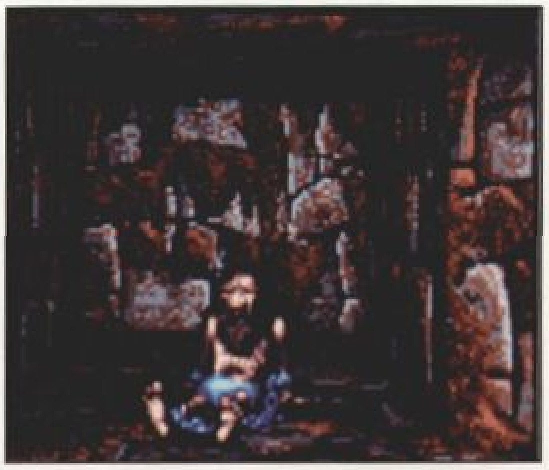


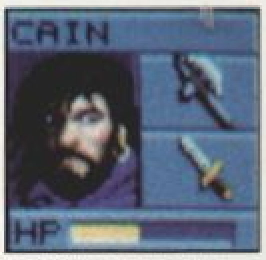


A fierce Amazonian warrior, BLADE has been a fighter from birth and is skilled with knife and sword, particularly the vicious bastard sword - it's rippled blade inflicts great damage on even the most heavily-armoured foe. But beware - a hot-headed vixen is she, and is often given to rash behaviour that may put the party in unnecessary danger.

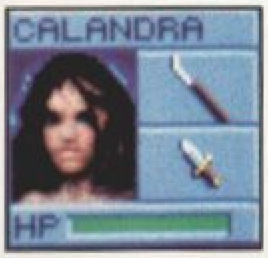


BYERE is a dwarven thief. Though unparalleled in his skill at detecting traps, and having an unnerving ability to sniff out gold and jewels, his clumsiness is legendary. Recruit him to your party, but whatever you do DON'T send him out on recce missions!

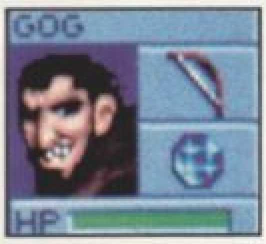




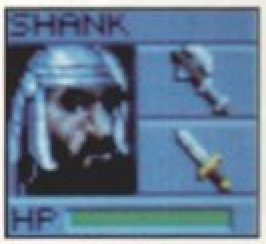
The sly CAIN is a talented thief, adept at picking locks and spotting traps. But his need for stealth prevents him wearing heavy armour, making him vulnerable to attacks. Keep him out of danger to the rear of the party - but don't keep any valuables in your back pocket.



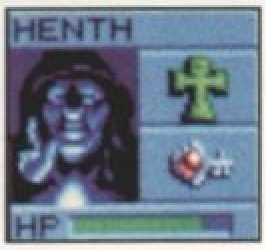
The elven CALANDRA is a slight and fragile figure, and should be kept safe to the rear of the party. However, she's not as weedy as she first appears - her accuracy with her spear, carved from mystical elven wood, is uncanny, making her handy for combat down long corridors.



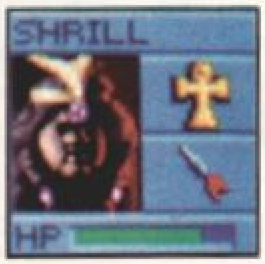
Do not let GOG join your party under any circumstances - he's as light-fingered as he is ugly. Many have been conned by his affable manner and initial friendliness, only to find themselves lost in a dungeon maze, their treasure stolen and a horde of Balrogs bearing down on them, all because of Gog's foul treachery.



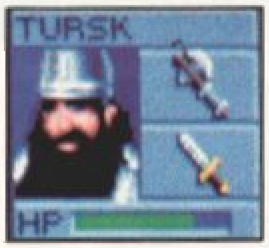
The archetypical taciturn strongman, SHANK's handling of his axe may lack finesse but his sheer brute strength makes up for that - when his blow does strike home there's little likelihood of his opponent recovering. Quiet but trustworthy, he is a stolid, firm pillar for any party.



HENTH is a powerful cleric, but his past is shrouded in mystery. Any attempts to talk to him about his past are greeted by stony silence. No-one is quite sure which deity - good or evil - he serves. Though greatly versed in the holy arts of healing and divining, this uncertainty as to Henth's true allegiance makes him a risky choice.



SHRILL is very good at the laying on of hands, but his bulky form makes him useless at anything requiring physical exertion. Indeed his size makes him a bit of a liability down the narrow confines of a dungeon corridor. And if you do hire him, don't put him in charge of the food stores.

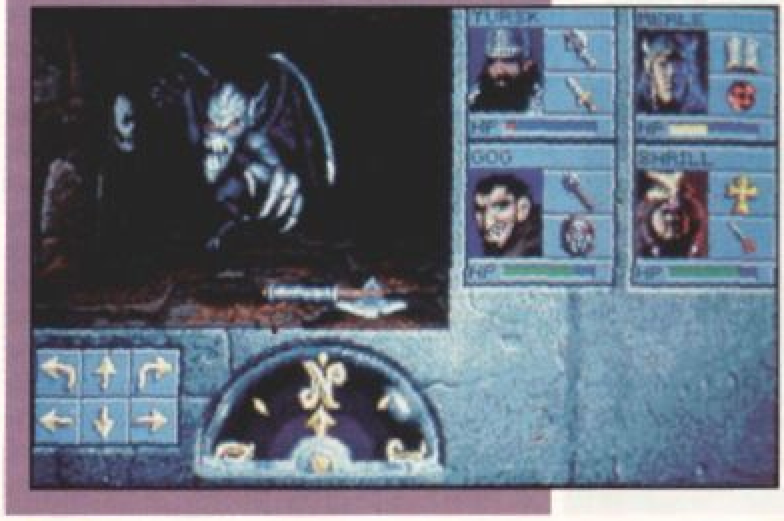


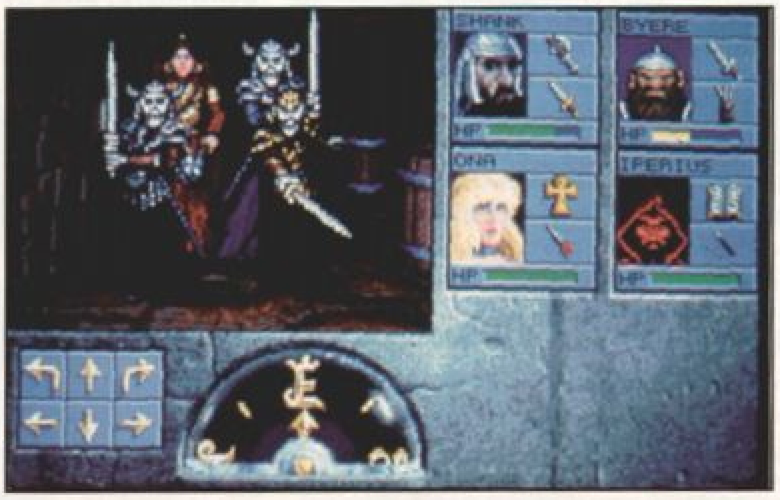
The dwarf TURSK makes a somewhat ridiculous sight, clad head to foot in shiny metal armour and wielding his giant axe. However, you'd be unwise to laugh at him - he doesn't take kindly to be being poked fun at, and he has the fighting prowess to back him up.

Be careful with Ice Storm because it's a distance spell and could rebound, your party would then take some unnecessary damage.

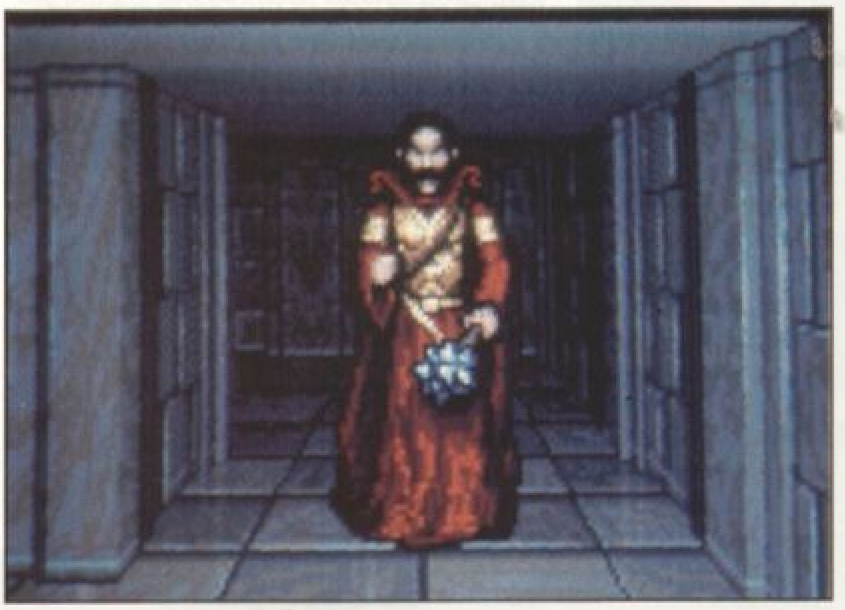
Global invulnerability protects your party against everything... including the dreaded dragon breath which is extremely unpleasant!

- Dungeon Masters each have their own playing preference and style - there's no perfect mix of characters in a party so just adapt the line-up until you feel comfortable.
- Concentrating on one particular skill will make a powerful character far more quickly than a jack of all trades.
- In the early levels you're just practising hand-to-hand combat using a combination of daggers, swords and axes. Try a few spells like Fireball, too.
- Remember you can move and fight at the same time.
- Weapons like long swords are better against taller monsters.





t's easy to see why Eye of the Beholder is the best example of this genre so far. One slip, either in combat or conversation, can bring the whole force of the enemy against you.



Seriously wounded characters should be moved out of the front rank. It's much easier to heal someone than bring them back from the dead.

IPERIUS is a mercenary magician. He's good and he knows it, only offering his services to the highest bidder. If you can afford the fee, he's a more than worthy addition to the party. But can he be trusted not to flee if things get really sticky?

Thanks to his half-elven blood, MERLE the magician makes up for his average spell-casting skills with his ability to commune with nature, a talent that comes in particularly handy when lost in the forests of the Realm.

Typically clerics are denied the use of any weapons that may draw blood. However, ONA's religion allows it's followers to use bows or darts, making her a worthy fighter as well as an invaluable healer. And her obvious physical charms may allow the party access to areas otherwise barred to the typical ugly bunch of males.

Though TULNIO's magic weaving if famed throughout the Realm, he is equally well-known for his doddering clumsiness. His mighty power makes him an invaluable member of any group - but take care to stand your distance when he's casting a Fireball spell!

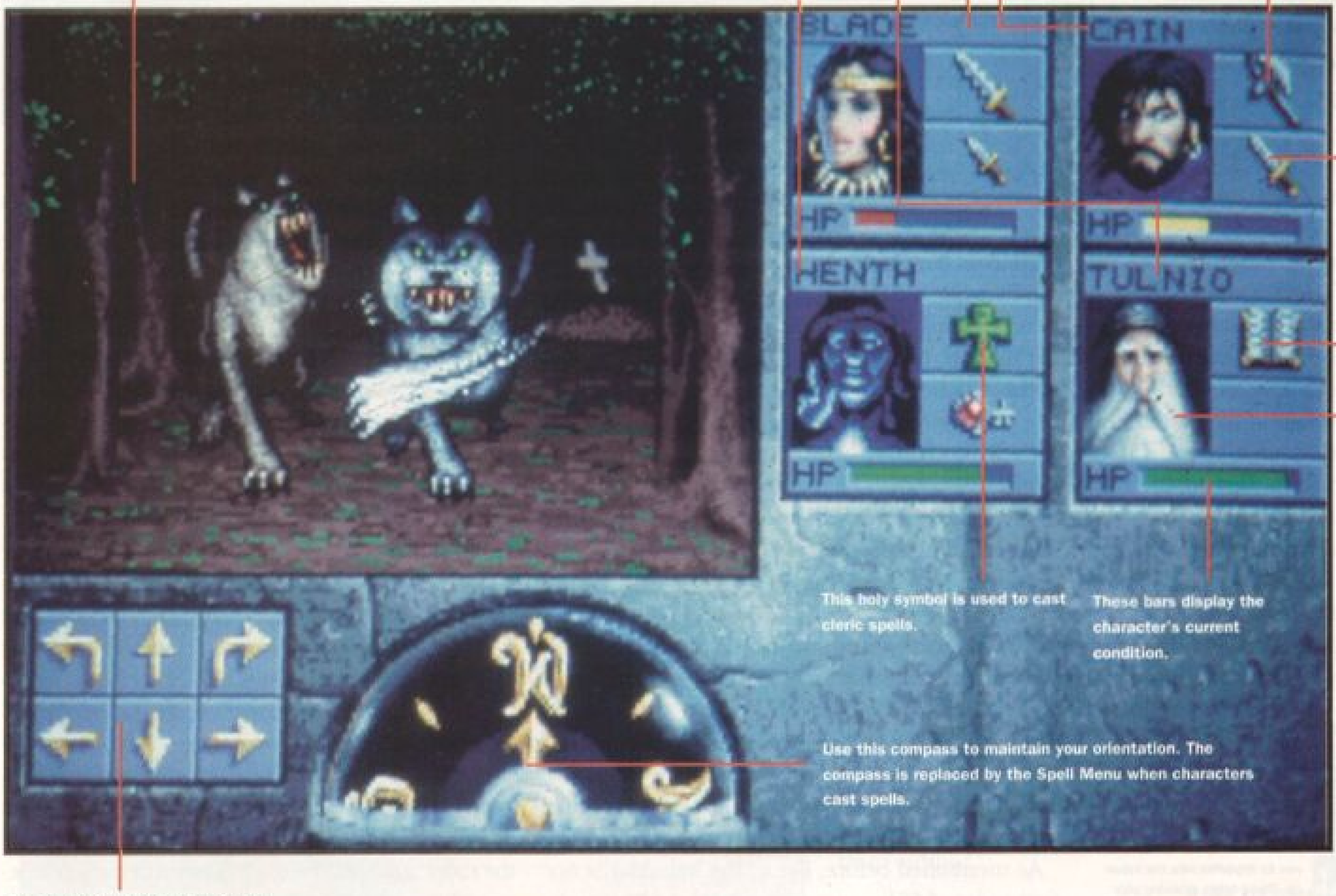
These two front rank characters are the only ones who can attack with melee weapons like swords, axes and maces or certain short range spells.

This is your 3D view to the fantasy world. Here you can see the immediate area around your party, items lying nearby and any attacking monsters.

Rear rank characters can only attack monsters with spells and such ranged weapons as bows, darts and spears. They can only be hit by enemy melee lunges if the creatures are attacking from behind or to the sides of the party.

Generally a character carries a weapon in their primary hand.

The secondary hand normally holds a shield, spellbook, holy symbol or another useful item.



This holy symbol is used to cast cleric spells.

These bars display the character's current condition.

Use this compass to maintain your orientation. The compass is replaced by the Spell Menu when characters cast spells.

Click on the spellbook icon to cast memorised mage spells. The essential action of casting spells has been made easier in Eye of the Beholder II.

Clicking on a character portrait will allow you to view their, ahem, equipment. If this portrait is greyed, the character is unconscious. If it's replaced by a skull, they're dead!

These buttons move and turn your party in the desired direction.

Keep fighters in the front rank of your party and vulnerable mages in the rear.

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

PC version

First the bad news, you'll need a hard drive to play this baby. Fortunately, Eye of the Beholder II works fine on a slow 12MHz machine. Apart from that, it supports any AdLib-compatible sound card along with EGA or proper 256-colour VGA graphics. The original didn't have any game over sequence, it just dropped out to DOS and you didn't even get a well done. This time, SSI is promising a very dramatic and really phenomenal ending. Three final words of warning, buy a mouse!

Amiga version

Amiga owners can expect to be enjoying Eye of the Beholder fun by Spring next year. And what do they have to thank for this rapid turn-around? Why, it's SSI's in-house graphic conversion system, of course. Hooray!

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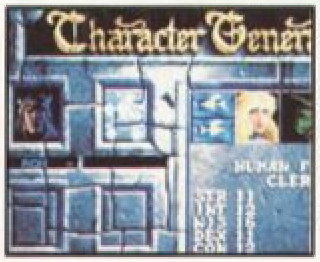
where the stories of evil are centred. In the middle of the forest rises the great Temple Dark Moon with its three massive towers. Your party must investigate the temple and uncover its terrifying secrets.

One important aspect of this follow-up is that your quest goes beyond the boring boundaries of underground passageways. Like the scenario suggests there are forests and towers in this compelling adventure. Not that there's a shortage of foreboding catacombs. Nevertheless, the whole tone is different from the last game. Apart from fighting their way through the monsters inside of Temple Dark Moon, your party must also deal with the many corrupt priests, enemy warriors and evil magicians that inhabit the temple and its towers.

There are over sixteen progressively meaner levels to explore and nearly seventy percent of the monsters who populate them are new. These include Giant Worker and Soldier Ants, Flying Fangs, Salamanders and Will 'o Wisps. Frost Giants crawl around on their knees because it's the only way they can fit inside the claustrophobic corridors. During the heat of battle their fist fills a third of the screen. A few of the old adversaries have also made the grade such as Giant Spiders, Mantis Warriors, Mind Flayers, Skeletal Warriors and, not one but many, Beholders. Monsters are now far more intelligent and will trigger certain effects depending on where they are and what they're doing. Some can open doors or steal stuff, so, you can't just assume that an object will always be there if you leave it on the ground. There's always something horrible lurking around the corner and it's how you react to this surprise element that makes or breaks your chances of survival.

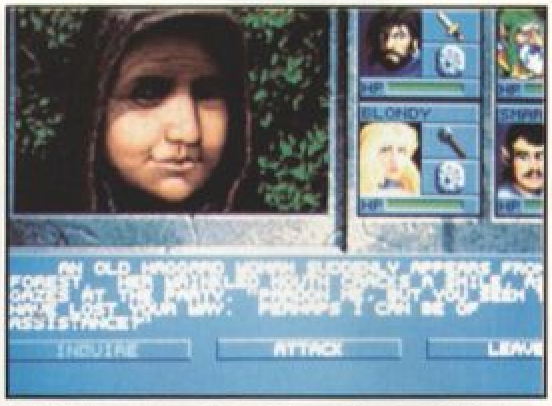


Similar to the first game, players can create their own teamsters to match their fave Advanced Dungeons & Dragons people and role playing stats. As a bonus, characters and some spells and potions from Eye of the Beholder can be imported into the follow up. Those hours of loving play time haven't been wasted after all!

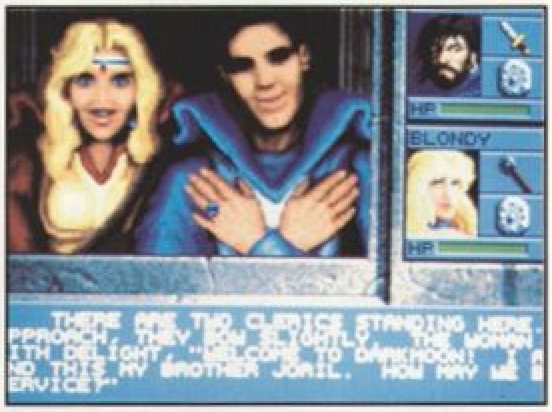
It's easy to see why this is the best of the genre so far. One slip, either in combat or conversation, can bring the whole force of the enemy against you.

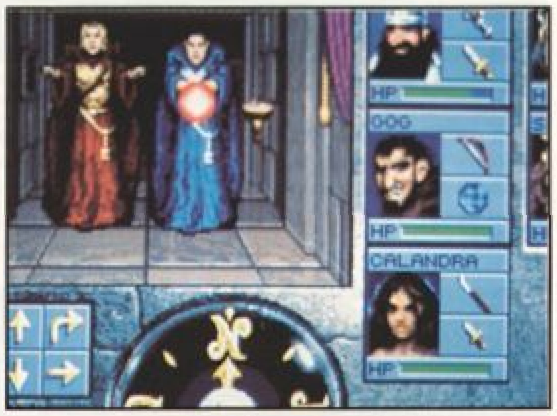
As mentioned before, Eye of the Beholder is the first series of SSI games where good quality graphics have been deemed important. This time round, you're also treated to transitional static pictures and animated sequences which move the plot forwards at set points in the game. These are coupled with over thirty musical interludes and strange noises to indicate there are scary things hanging round in the nearby area. There are almost two hundred sound effects giving the game a very rich feel, they also help you to immediately gauge the situation. Like an expertly crafted horror movie, you just know something bad is about to happen soon...

It's good to see gameplayer power has been utilised for once. Some five hundred purchasers of the first Eye of the Beholder told SSI what they liked and didn't like about it courtesy of a detailed survey. Thankfully, the majority of their suggestions have been put in. Anyhow, fans of the original will feel at home from the very start of play as the structure of the game is almost identical. Probably the most notable difference is when certain characters talk to your party, the bottom text screen enlarges to invoke a more in-depth conversation than before.



Khelban (left) summons your group on a stormy night and reveals the task ahead in this nifty animated sequence at the beginning of the game. There are far more characters to meet in this sequel, though not everyone is a friendly person out to aid your quest. It's up to your conversational skills to figure out the reliability of the fighters, mages and other fairy folk populating this world.





MASTER OF THE ART

With the wonderful written works of The Hobbit and The Lords of the Rings, JRR Tolkien is rightly regarded as the guru of dragon-infested fantasy. Born in South Africa almost one hundred years ago, he later moved to England and became a professor of philology, specialising in the study of Old and Middle English dialects, at Oxford University. His love of folklore prompted him to create his own fantasy universe called Middle-Earth and some great stories revealing the eternal struggle between the forces of good and evil. A devout Roman Catholic, Tolkien prevented the German translation of The Hobbit in 1938 when his publisher asked him to sign a statement saying he was 'Aryan'. His son, Christopher, completed the final novel, The Silmarillion, after Tolkien died in 1973. Without the literary genius and imagination of JRR Tolkien, fantasy role playing games like Eye of the Beholder II wouldn't even exist!

The rest of the interface is pretty much the same except when you come to casting spells.

This revised spell menu is much easier to use. Your ability to cast spells with a single click during combat is incredibly useful, especially when you're struggling in the higher levels. Spells now go up to seventh level which apparently means there are some meaty effects to be discovered later on. As far as I'm concerned, the improved Identify spell is damn convenient when it comes to meeting the overwhelming cast of supporting characters this time around. How else could you tell a beauty from a bitch without getting hurt, bitter and twisted? At least mages have the ability of True Seeing, allowing them to get through illusionary walls. There's also a more powerful Heal spell for clerics along with its reverse called, unsurprisingly, Harm. One of my faves of all time is the Wall of Force which erects a transparent glass-like barrier to stop monsters in their tracks.

My only major criticism is that the game lacks an automapping capability to stop you going round in circles. It's a real pain having to track of yourself on a piece of paper. According to Producer George MacDonald, this annoying omission has nothing to do with commercial considerations like the impending Clue Book and 0898 hintline due early next month. Hmmm...

More continuation than revelation, Eye of the Beholder II is bigger and ever-so-slightly better than the original. SSI and Westwood Associates have played it safe and produced an acceptable, if not exactly revolutionary, sequel. I just wish somebody would really push this style of game to the limit. What about giving it a go with the third outing?

● Rik Haynes

What can you look forward to in this bigger and brighter dungeon exploring epic? More or less the same sort of action, improved graphics and sound effects, new monsters to the tune of seventy percent, chilling torture chambers, spells and potions never seen in the original, greater interaction with the other characters found in the game, damsels in distress, flying snakes and giant worker ants, towers and additional outside locations to wander through, even more difficult puzzles and tricky traps, and, erm, a neat intro. How about that little lot for starters, eh?

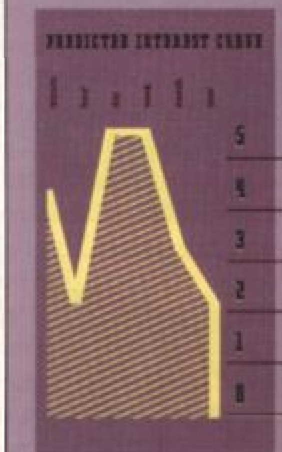
- Has the edge over Dungeon Master, Might & Magic III and, barely, the original.
- Multiple game positions can now be saved.
- Players can transfer their favourite characters over from the first Eye of the Beholder.

- Lacks an important automapping facility.
- Isn't that much different to the first game.
- Monsters could benefit from more frames of animation.

893 STRATING

G	IQ	A	FF
7	8	6	9

Atmospheric intro sequence incorporating lashings of frightening thunder claps and shadowy figures sets the scene well. Wonder why this couldn't have been an accessory datadisk for the first game? Despite initial despair, total elation after the realisation that this offers a lot more than the original. Might as well face it, you're hooked. Several sleepless hours should ensue until you've finally completed the quest. The real complaint is that it's all too linear. Will you ever go back to Eye of the Beholder II once you've finished it? Unlikely. On a happier note, SSI reckons there are at least forty playing hours in there. After that, you'll be swapping dungeon exploring yarns with your friends while eagerly awaiting the next instalment. Like I said before, sad!



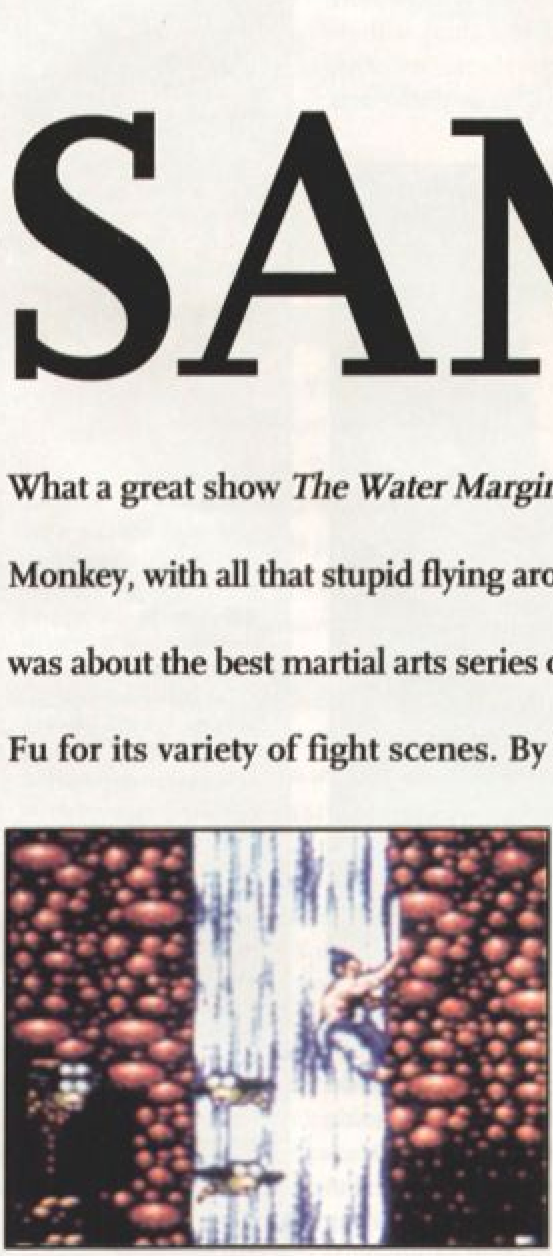
RATINGS

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER 2

Genre Arcade Adventure
Publisher Image Works
Developer Vivid Image
Price £25.99

FIRST SAMURAI

What a great show *The Water Margin* was. Far better than its poxy follow up Monkey, with all that stupid flying around on pink clouds, *The Water Margin* was about the best martial arts series on TV for years. Better, even, than Kung Fu for its variety of fight scenes. By far the most exciting part of the show was the big battle sequence at the end of each episode. The heroes' swords would flash and clang as their legion enemies screamed and fell out of shot, clutching their bellies and rolling their eyes. Cracking entertainment.



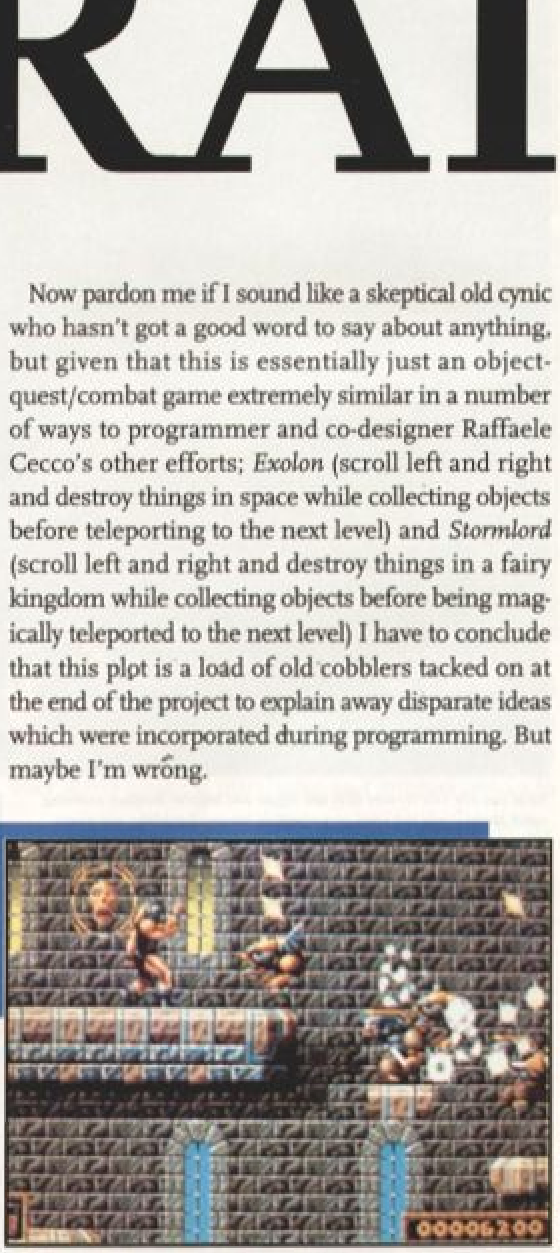
(Above) Ooh. Doesn't it drive you up the wall? Ho ho. The First Samurai is at his most vulnerable when climbing like this, since he needs to detach himself from the walls in order to fight.

(Left top and bottom) Fend off the foes for long enough to collect point-boosting treasure and the player will be rewarded with a choral sample of "Hallelujah!"

To all intents and purposes, The First Samurai is about as close to the no-nonsense slashing excellence of *The Water Margin* as a computer game will ever get. As an explanation for the bloodthirsty combat in which the player is invited to indulge, the opening sequence presents a classic yarn about the brutal murder of the First Samurai's Master by an evil Demon King. Despite the fact that this is really rather tired honour and revenge nonsense, and that the graphics for this bit would look more at home on the plates you get in Chinese restaurants than in a rollicking arcade adventure, it does allow open minded players some belief in the ludicrous It's-the-future-but-it-looks-like-the-past premise.

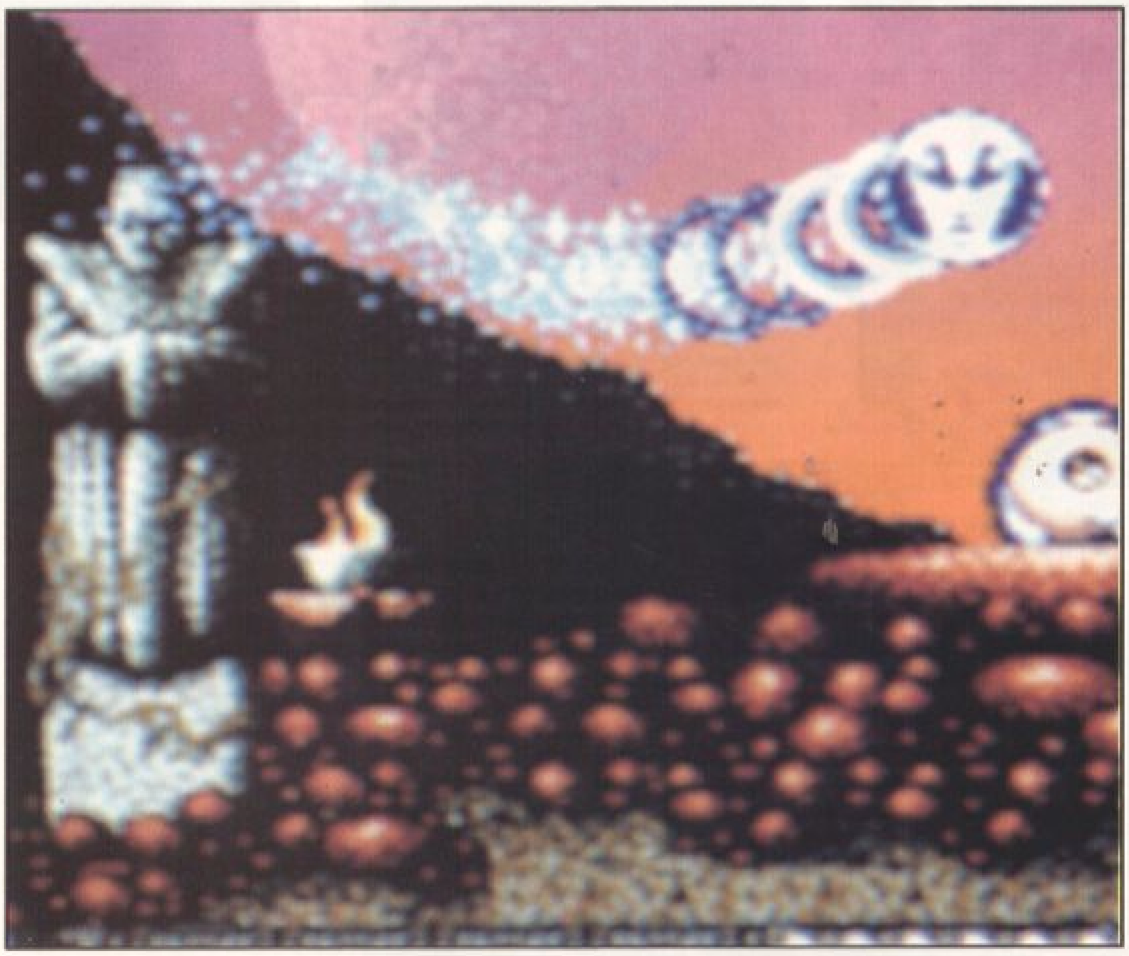
Basically, having done in the Master, the Demon King flees into the future in order to wreak more havoc as is Demons' wont, I suppose. Our hero the Samurai, however, is having none of this, and begs a conveniently present Wizard-Mage to send him too into the future in order to retrieve the Demon King and destroy him at the foot of his mountain throne.

Now pardon me if I sound like a skeptical old cynic who hasn't got a good word to say about anything, but given that this is essentially just an object-quest/combat game extremely similar in a number of ways to programmer and co-designer Raffaele Cecco's other efforts; *Exolon* (scroll left and right and destroy things in space while collecting objects before teleporting to the next level) and *Stormlord* (scroll left and right and destroy things in a fairy kingdom while collecting objects before being magically teleported to the next level) I have to conclude that this plot is a load of old cobblers tacked on at the end of the project to explain away disparate ideas which were incorporated during programming. But maybe I'm wrong.



compare & contrast

The First Samurai, being a fairly even blend of both slashing action and object collection, is quite a tricky game to directly compare with any other. However, in a number of ways it comes close to the Bitmap Bros' Gods. While the Bitmap game



(Left) The Regeneration Game! Pots littering the landscape can be activated by the player's command, removing the need for tiresome back-tracking every time a life is lost.

But it doesn't matter a jot - or even a fig - because the game is a stunner. What it all boils down to is the player's mission to battle his way through the levels of the game, each representing a different area of 24th Century Japan, battling the end-of-level monsters and gradually pursuing the Demon King. Before the Samurai can reach the end of each level, however, he will face a number of geographic puzzles. Some of which can be solved with simply a little brain power and agility. Others require the summoning of some mystical aid in the shape of the Wizard-Mage. But more of him later.

Whenever the Samurai appears, either at the start of a new level or after his energy has been gradually worn away to zero and he's beginning a new life, a swirling orb of lifeforce beams the player down next to an earthenware pot. Littering the landscape, these pots can be used as markers. The by striking the pot, the player can flag his progress thus far, and the next time he dies (or drinks a teleport potion), he will be repositioned at the most recently activated pot. However, such position-flagging is costly to the Samurai's mystic ability and so should be used with care.

has more taxing puzzles, First Samurai has far more appealing combat routines. Samurai, surprisingly, also wins out in the graphics stakes, because although the Bitmap game was undeniably beautiful to look at, the screens were just *too* packed to make for pleasing long-term viewing.

Now, distinct from his physical strength, which gets worn away during combat and is replenished with food as you would expect, the player can collect mystic power through defeating the minions of the Demon King. His mystic power is represented by a sword in the lower right portion of the display area. When the Samurai has enough mystic ability, he will automatically be armed with his magic sword. "My sword!" he helpfully announces.

As well as facilitating far greater combat success, thus perpetuating his mystic ability, the sword acts as a buffer for the Samurai in especially hostile situations. Even once the Samurai's strength has been worn down to nothing, he won't die if he is holding his sword. Instead his sword will fly off and be sacrificed for some extra physical energy, giving the player another chance to find some food. However, don't be fooled into thinking that this means that the Samurai has an easy life. On the contrary, his life force can be sapped away at any second, just by standing in the wrong place at the wrong time. Fire breathing dragons scorch the poor Samurai's head. Enormous statues rumble down corridors and crush him to death. And there are bridges which collapse dropping the Samurai into deadly fire pits. And all of these hazards are quite aside from the rank and file of the Demon King's minions, all hell bent on the player's destruction.

To all intents and purposes, The First Samurai is about as close to the no-nonsense slashing excellence of *The Water Margin* as a computer game will ever get.

A jolly good job, then, that the Samurai is one of the most rock-hard heroes ever to appear in a computer game. Not only is he tough enough to wander around without a vest, but he has six unarmed combat moves to his disposal and five moves available when armed.

Unfortunately, all this muscle-bound machismo doesn't come without a price. The Samurai walks around at a pace more akin to that of a pissed Sumo wrestler than a tip-top killing athlete. So the player spends most of his time jumping around (a far faster mode of travel) to cover any distance.

It's during the combat sequences in particular (and there are many) that First Samurai's graphics really grab the player's interest. While the visuals for much of the game's scenery could be said to be workmanlike, the animations for the Samurai himself and the foes he must combat are excellent. They're not even particularly detailed, but the feeling of hard-edged violence they give is cracking.

Control over the Samurai - apart from normal walking - is of the finest quality too, allowing the player to flick around and alternate his attacks from one direction to another in a split second. He can also kick above his head to de-tooth oncoming foes and even slice away below him while in mid air, clearing the way while he falls down pits and shafts.

An especially pleasing factor of The First Samurai's design is that it's vital that the player clangs and slices his way through as many enemies as possible. Not only is the demise of each foe accompanied by either a squeal or a rousing fanfare, (indeed, the spot effects throughout the whole game are excellent) but it's only by killing the monsters and thus keeping the Samurai's mystical ability topped up that certain problems can be overcome.

It's the mystic solution to some problems which essentially are either a turn-on on not, depending entirely on personal taste. Some players will be pleased that they are continually aware of their aim during each section of each level. This is usually an object collection subtext to the kicking. Some, on the other hand, may find it frustrating to have an excellent fighting romp complicated by lots of nancy-boy of exploration.

Whatever, the way they work is this. At certain points, the player will have to get past a generally naturally created obstacle; a waterfall, a volcano etc. Whenever the obstacle is simply too much for the player to handle on his own, the Wizard-Mage will

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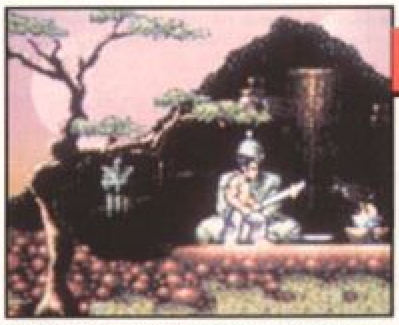
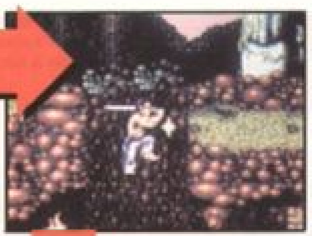
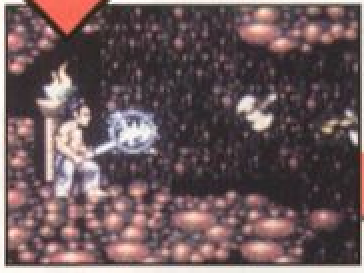


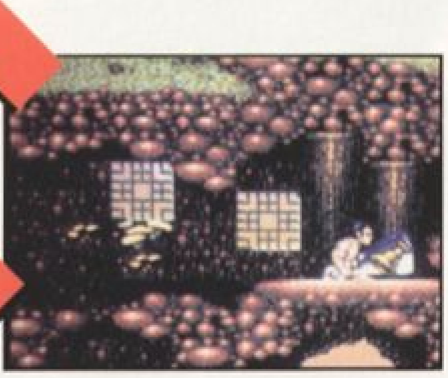
And so,we begin! Collect the daggers which lie at the Samurai's feet and prepare for battle. Note the Regeneration pot which can be struck to avoid going back to the start every time. Since this is the start, however, there isn't much benefit in striking it.

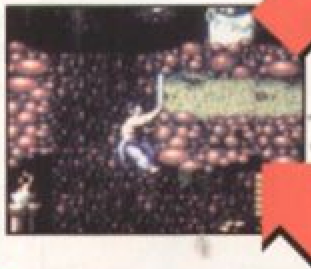
Next, move off to the right and slash a hole in the floor, allowing the Samurai to drop down.

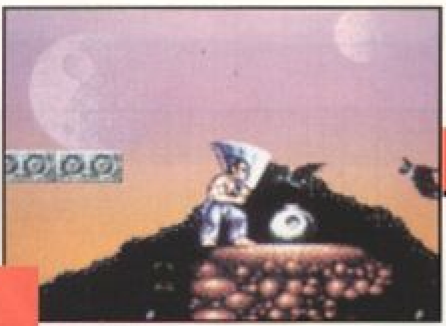
Once underground, collect the Magic Bell and get glanging away at those flies, you're going to need all your mystic energy!



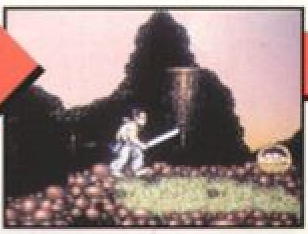




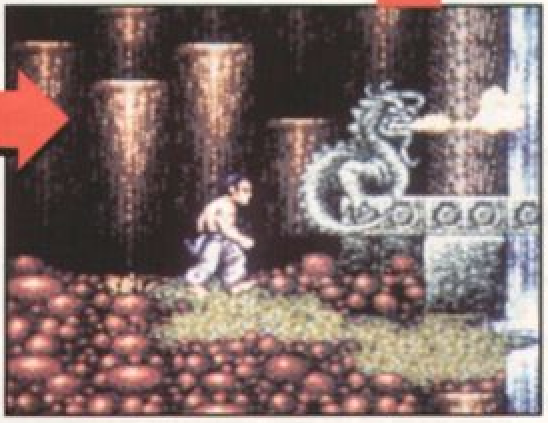




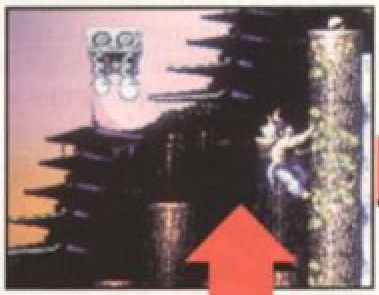
Cling onto the walls and clamber back up the screen, leading to the second regeneration pot. Slash those bats! Braver players may want to explore the stone ledge on the left, but let's not bother, eh? Instead, continue to move right...

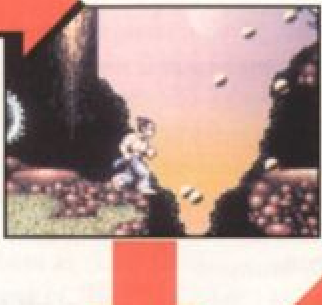


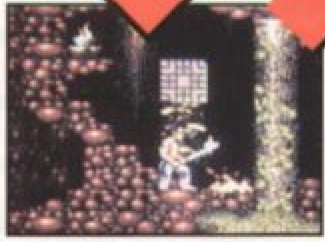
Food. Yum!

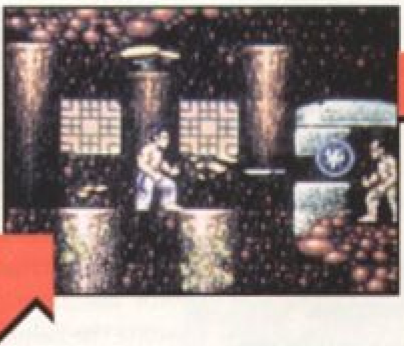


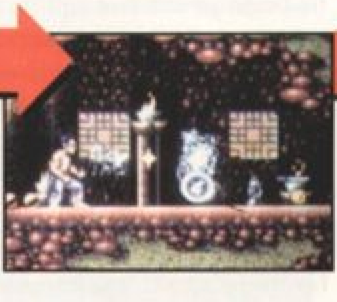
Out of the frying pan and into the, well, dragons, I suppose. There's no chance of getting past these fellas, so some upward mobility is called for.



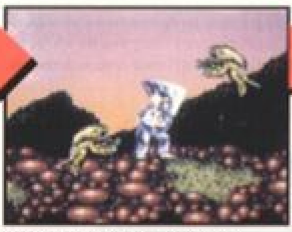




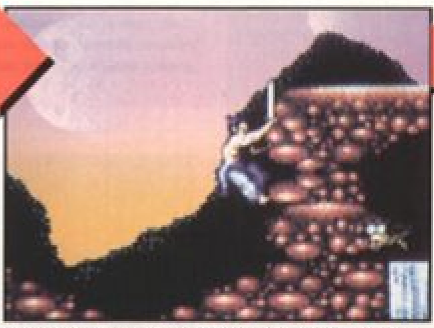




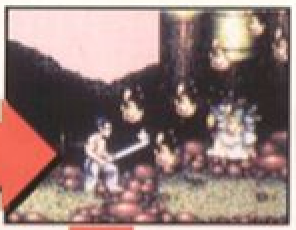
Samurai combines both arcade action with puzzle-solving elements in an effective and appealing way, keeping both hardcore killers and those with more cerebral intentions equally happy.

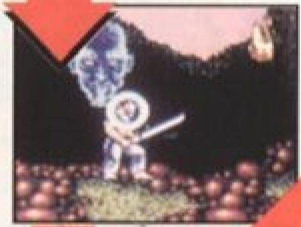


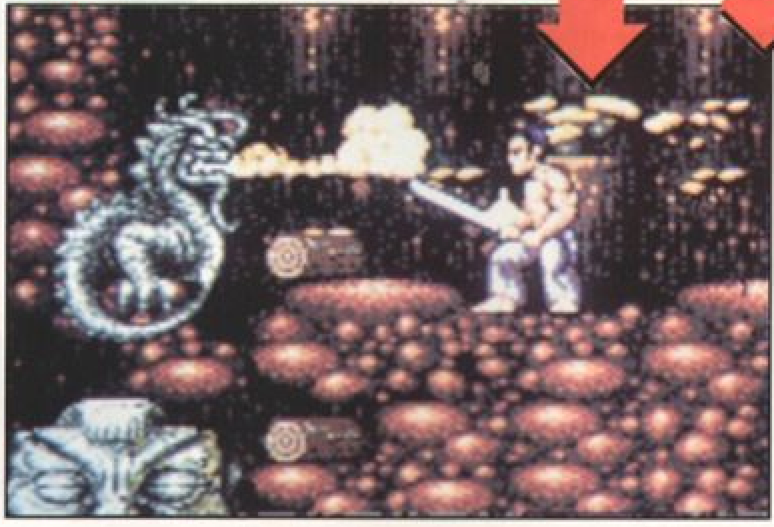
Aiee! The horrible face-hugger-alike monsters will set about the Samurai, so he'll need to employ all his twisty-turny skills. Don't dawdle, since there's a great many of these things, and they're much easier to simply jump past, anyway.

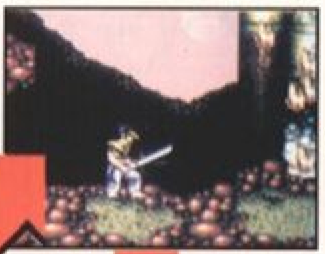


Shin up that wall, you horrible little man! Now, drop down the other side and - urk! What possible way past this terrible fire storm? Aha! Maybe the Wizard Mage will come to your aid. Still, while you're here, it makes sense to explore the caverns, only to fine - a magic log!

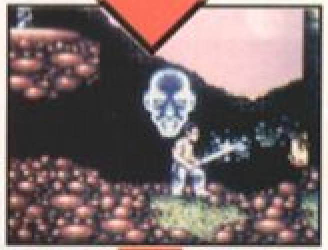




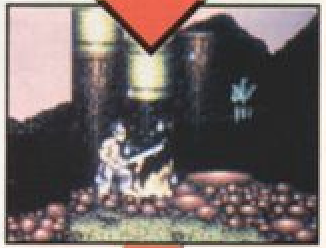




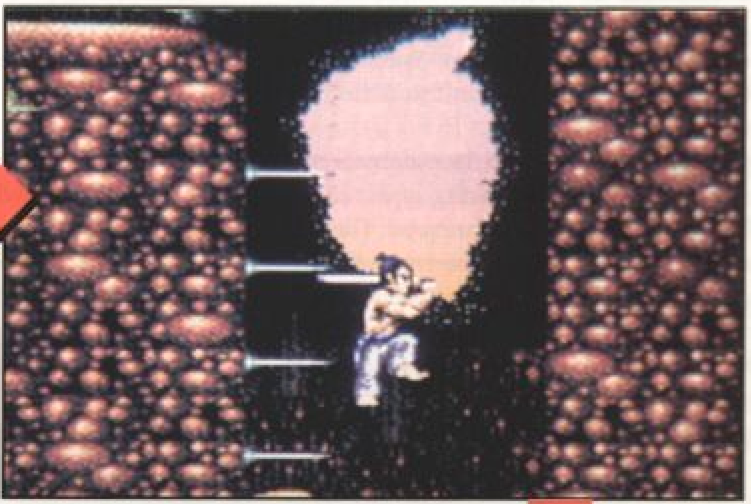
Back up top again, and time to summon the Wizard with your bell...



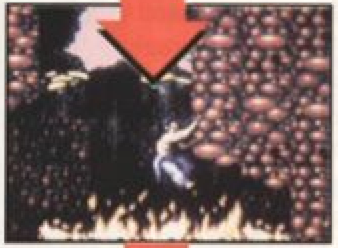
Hooray! The mage dutifully appears and rains on the fire...



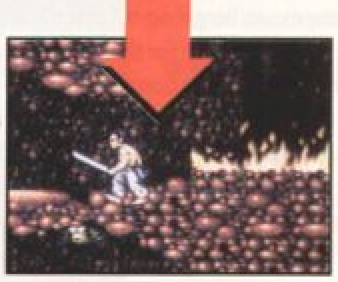
Making it safe for the Samurai to cross.



Having battled the man with a daggers and collecting all the tresure in the chest, our brave hero must move off the screen to the right and prepare for some major heroics.



By leaping far enough off to the right, the deadly steel spindles sticking out of the walls can be avoided, long enough to cling to the walls saving the Samurai from tumbling into the burning pits, allowing him to progress onto later, more exciting stages.



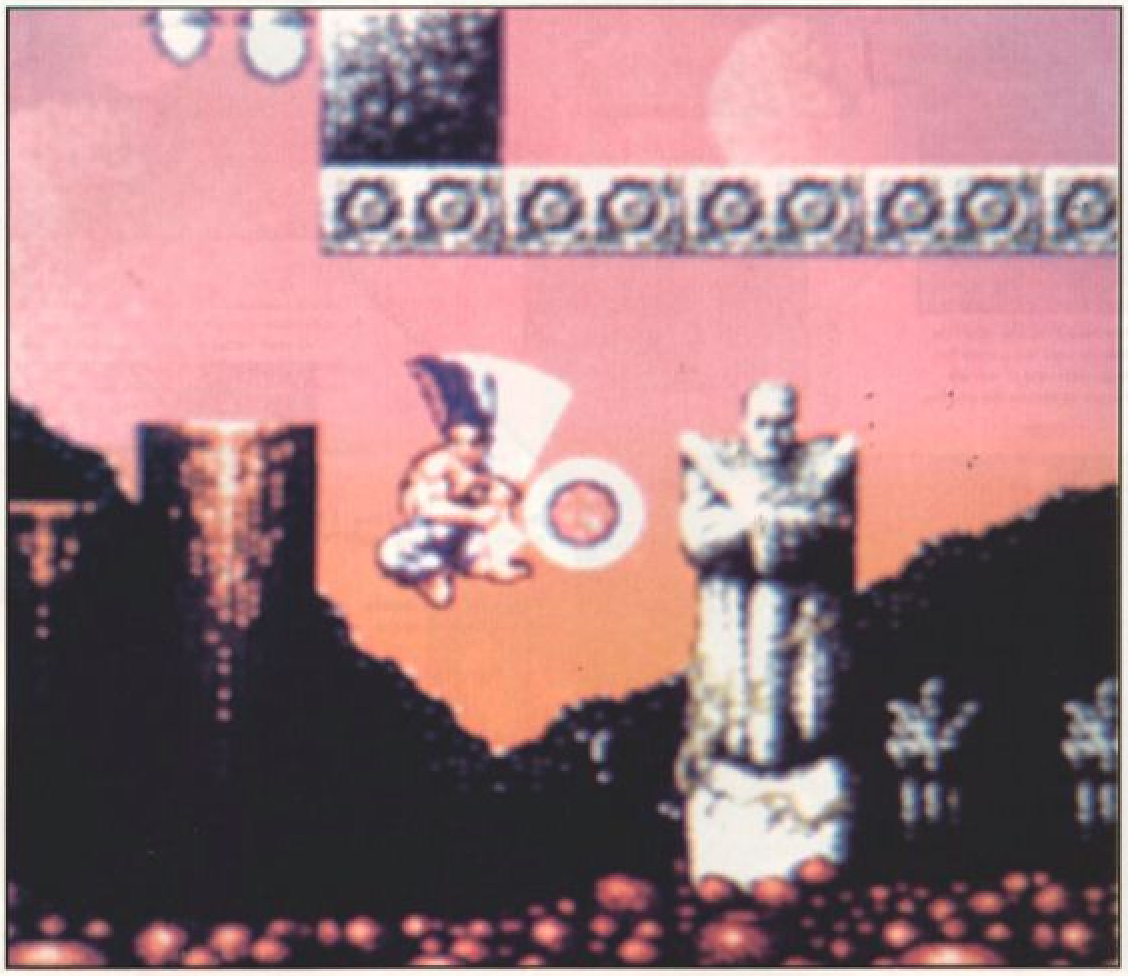
A SINGLE STEP

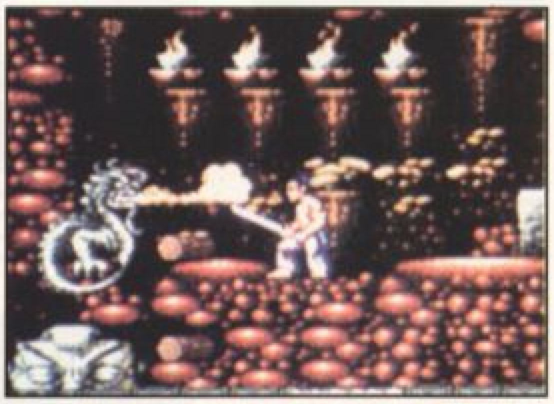
Even the longest journies, we all know, begin with but a single step. And the journey of the First Samurai through the massive landscape of 24th Century Japan is longer than most.

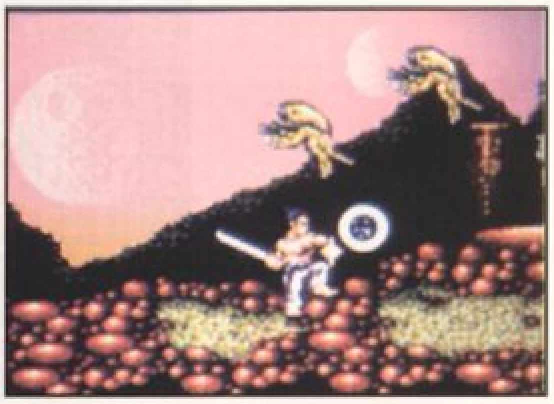
Here we have a section of Level 1, leading you through the Samurai's exploration and combat encounters. Gradually introducing the player to the idea of thinking in ten different directions at once, even at this early stage, there is some frantic combat and thorny problems.

The First Samurai doesn't actually feel like a particularly difficult game, because the Samurai himself is so fantastically tough, but non-thinking players will find themselves grinding to something of a halt, stumped by energy-sapping problems long before the combat gets too much for them.

Begin in the very top left of the page and follow the red arrows from one screen to another and you'll finish off at the bottom (just to the left of this panel, in fact) with a pretty good idea of the sort of action you'd face in the game.







(Left) Look at the speed blur on that! The graphics for Samurai are a peculiar mixture. They're certainly not the most sophisticated looking images ever to grace a computer screen, but the make for an exciting visual romp nonetheless.

Amiga version

A dual disk product with mercifully little swapping involved. Although some of the graphics are less than works of art (some are a bit chunky), the feel of the game, especially with excellent combat effects and a rocking soundtrack is pretty special. Meg owners get the usual bells and whistles too.

ST version

Following hot on the heels of the Amiga version, the ST game should be with us by the Spring. While inevitable sacrifices will have to be made in the audio stakes (don't expect to hear the sampled screams from the original) Vivid Image's previous ST track record is solid.

PC version

Alas, at this stage we understand that there are no plans to allow PC owners to enjoy Samurai's rucking action on their own machines.

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pop up to lend an ethereal hand. But it's no good simply expecting old Magey to appear and sort out all the Samurai's problems. Nope. The player has to earn his help. Only when the player's mystical powers are at their peak can the Wizard Mage be summoned.

Whenever the Mage can be of use, a faint outline of his head will float around in the sky, nodding towards the problem. It's up to the player to decide whether the Mage on his own can deal with the problem using the magic he has at his disposal or whether the Mage himself needs some help. In the first case, the player must ring his magic bell (yes, really) to summon the Mage, whereupon he will help if he can. In the second instance, the Mage will automatically use any appropriate Special Items which the player has collected for him during his quest.

It's during this search for the Special items that players unkeen on the adventuring aspect of the game will find themselves most frustrated. The first level (as depicted over the page) centres on the fascinating collection of logs which the Wizard Mage will turn into a bridge across a big waterfall. Once the layout of the level has been learnt, it's easy enough for the player to plot his route and collect all the logs without too much to-ing and fro-ing. However, during the actual level-learning process, the player does seem to spend an inordinate amount of time spotting unattainable logs and then having to work out how to back track through the landscape in order to reach them.

As well as the normal routes which the Samurai can use to get around the landscape, he can also hack and slash his way through thinner walls and floors, allowing access to secret rooms. Hacking away at the scenery, even in areas where nothing special seems to be going on can occasionally yield extra food and treasure for the player; a real Godsend in tough combat situations.

Even during the most frantic and desperate moments during the Samurai's campaign, the player never gets the feeling that he is being treated unfairly. And more importantly, the game instils in him a determination to finally catch the bleed-

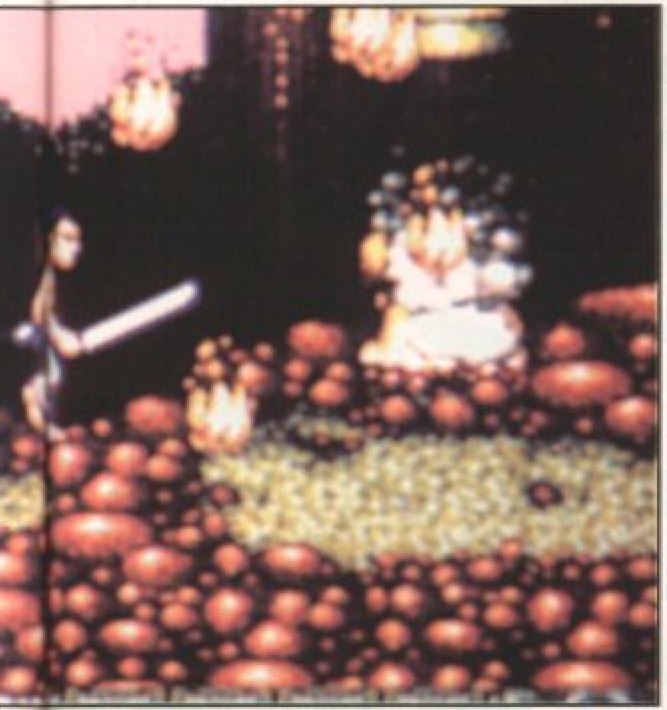
My, what big levels you have! Yup, here we are just part way through the first stage, and we haven't even got to the big puzzle which allows the player to even reach the big monster. Phew.

ing Demon King and give him the kicking he so richly deserves.

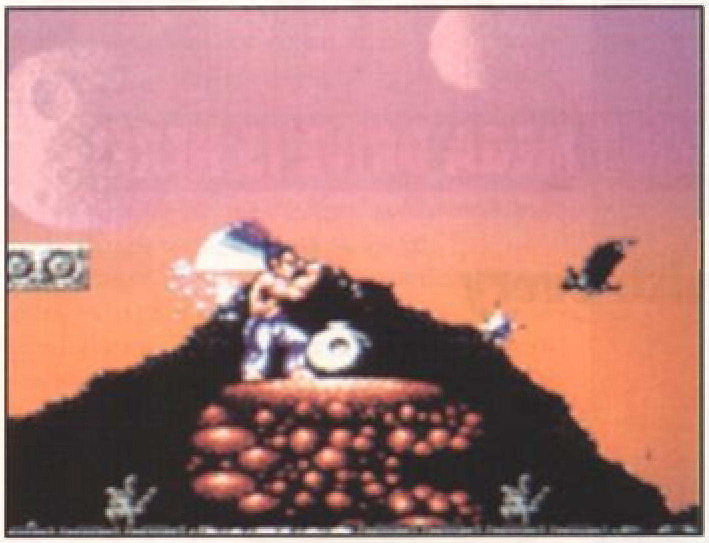
Despite the title's corny sideswipe at another series of martial arts adventures on the market, First Samurai has turned out to be an admirably polished and rounded project, with more than enough originality and only a few slips in execution.

While it could be said that the last thing the world needs is either another martial arts game or another collect-the-objects adventure, First Samurai carefully sidesteps the argument by blending both styles in an effective and appealing way, keeping both hardcore killers and those with more cerebral intentions equally happy.

● Jim Douglas



MAYBE WE SHOULD DISCUSS THIS OUTSIDE...



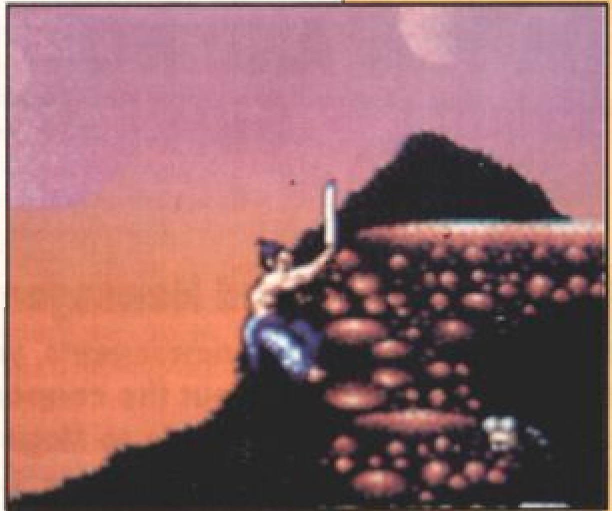
Ledges apparently leading off in completely the wrong direction should be explored, since they usually yield a healthy treasure or food bonus. Obviously, some serious prioritising is necessary in order to weigh up whether it's worth going out of the way. Whatever, it's handy to know where they are.

For a fat little fellow in purple trousers, The First Samurai can't half put himself about. An annoying problem with lots of arcade adventures of late, especially those where the player controls a creature (as opposed to a helicopter or a robot) is that the combat side of the game often gets toned down in order to make way for more adventuring. Stuff that! I want a good dust-up for my money.

And that's exactly what The First Samurai delivers. If you decide that you couldn't give two hoots about chasing down the Demon King and just want a top quality fighting frenzy, this is the game for you. On top of all the combat moves available making the game one of the most flexible around, the Samurai can clamber all over the landscape, hacking, slashing, punching and kicking wherever he pleases.

Even when unarmed, the Samurai boasts an impressive array of fighting moves, and for once the monsters he has to fight actually seem to attack in a way making for entertaining viewing. The evil bloodsucking bats that swoop about the screen divebomb the player at just the right angle for either the overhead-slash or a flying kick to do away with them in most excellent style.

Like Douglas Fairbanks, the player will often find himself scrapping away in a losing position, cornered or outnumbered by his foes. All he has to to is leap out of the way and pick himself a better position to continue the fight. This run, fight, run, fight action makes for exciting stuff, especially when the Magic Sword is in play and the player can see its silvery shape cutting a swathe through the Demon King's forces.



Not perhaps since Way of the Exploding Fist has a character responded to player commands in such a satisfying way, switching direction in the blink of an eye and behaving entirely intuitively. The speed of the response is so rapid that the Samurai will completely keep up with the player's demands, slashing away maybe five times in a couple of seconds, twisting and turning as he goes.

The only criticism of the combat that I can possibly make is that pressing the Fire button when no special weapons are held has no effect, and it takes a tiny bit of getting used to to realise that a direction *and* Fire must be held down.

For the most part, however, this doesn't really matter since the player is likely to be changing direction so much that he will rarely encounter the problem.

So, hooray for fighting games and more importantly, decent fighting in arcade adventures. Let's put an end to all this fairy-ing around and dodging every confrontation in sight and have some more quality kicking!

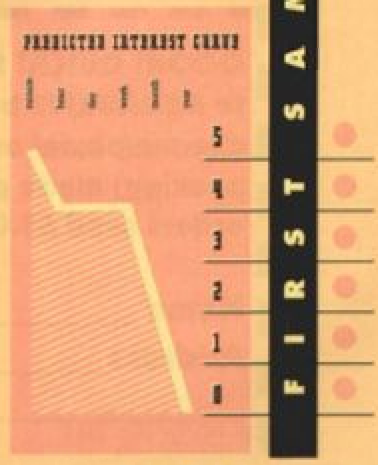
RATINGS

Cracking Action! Excellent Audio. Adventurey twist.	Useless storyline. Some tasks are a bit dull - collecting logs? Oh, please.

895 AMIGA RATING

G	IQ	A	IF
8	4	9	8

The First Samurai is not going to hold your attention longer than a strategy game. However, it may well do surprisingly well *against the other arcade adventures* in your collection, largely thanks to the blend of action and adventure. Neither side has been skimped on, so the player gets an imediately gratifying opportunity to crack some skulls before being gently lead into the adventuring side. The most serious criticism of Samurai is that owing to the occasionally less than gripping nature of the puzzles, and the size of the levels (some of which are H-U-G-E) the player may find himself slightly frustrated by the amount of ground he has to cover while collecting the various nick-nacks necessary to leave the level.



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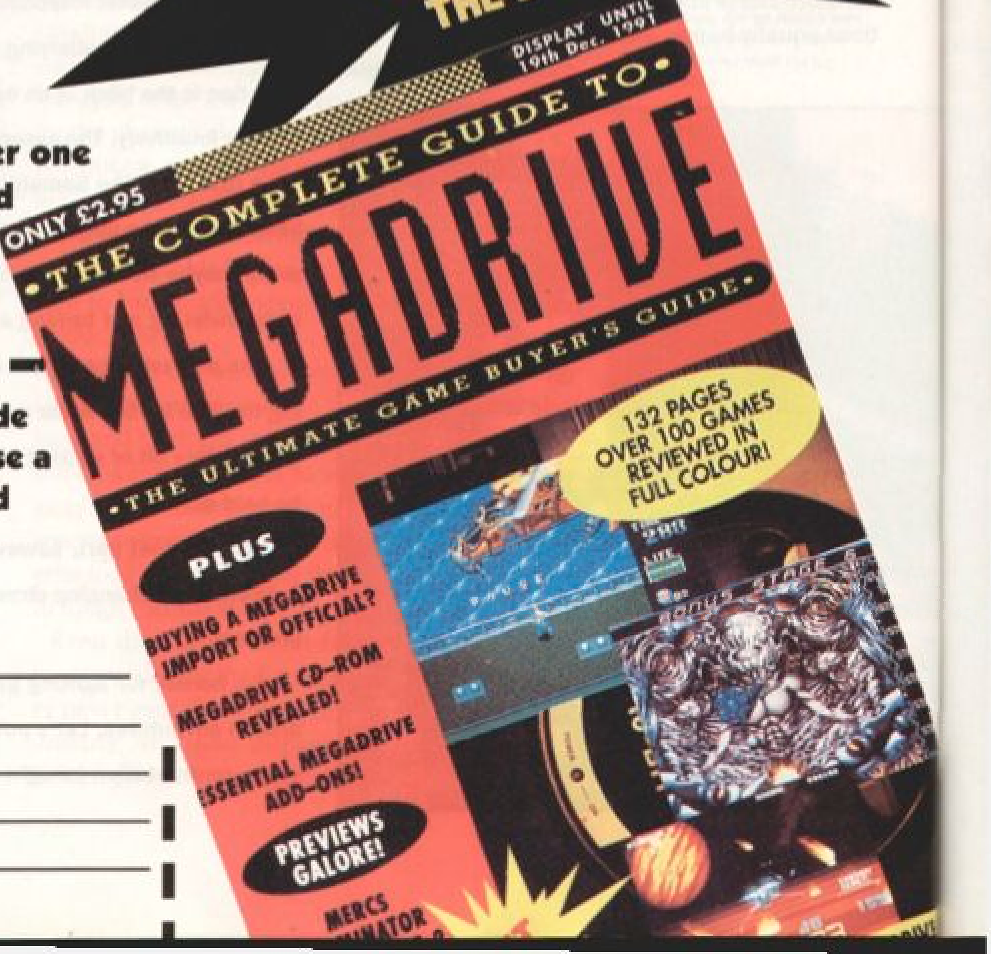
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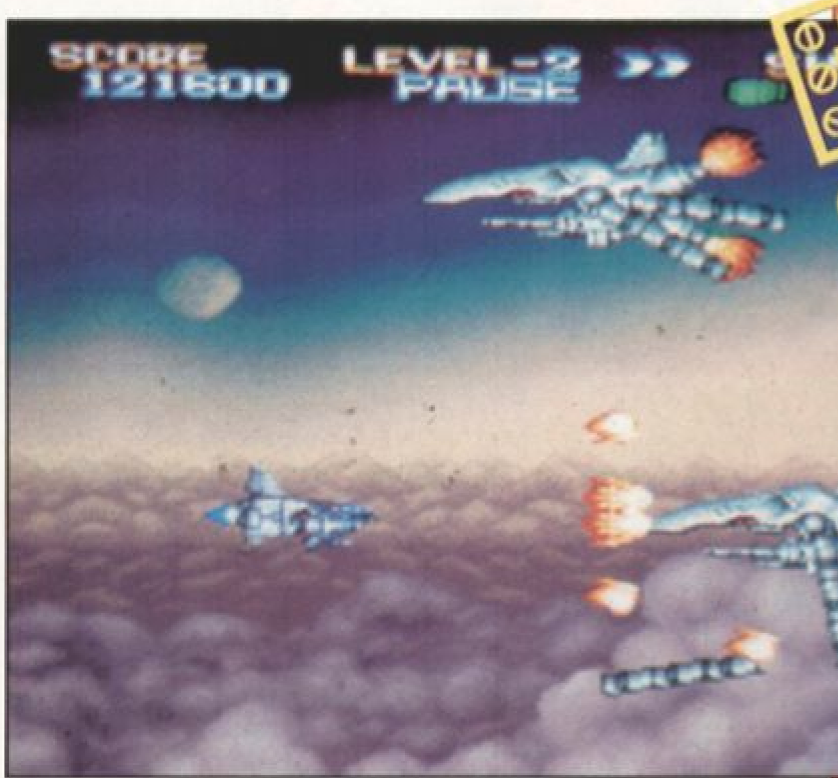
SUPER E.D.F.



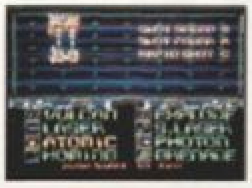
Oh dear. Once again that old favourite of human traits, xenophobia, has provided a rather lame excuse for a slice of shoot-'em-up action. In a storyline rather more blatant than most, Super EDF (Earth Defence Force) tells of a gang of megalomanic aliens (who doubtless have no morals at all and reprehensible personal hygiene habits) who are itching to get their clammy sucker-hands on our beloved planetoid.

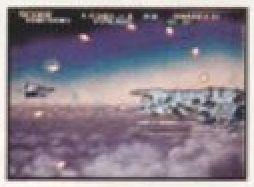
Fortunately, us clever humans knew that this was going to happen sooner or later, and so set up an elite fighter wing designed to repel any such green and slimy invasion attempts - the Earth Defence Force. Now that Zero Hour has arrived, it's time for you, as the squadron's top pilot, to get up there and kick the alien filth back to the festering hellhole it came from.

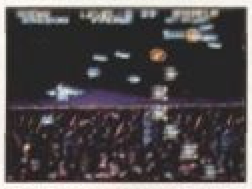
It has to be said that the game itself isn't any more innovative than its storyline - but it's no less enjoyable because of it. Just speed your way through the various backdrops (which range from the skies above the planet to more foreboding deep-space scenarios), cutting through the oncoming aliens, which attack in various waves and formations. Every now and again there's a slightly larger mini-boss to pump full of lead, and then at the end - surprise, surprise - a mammoth guardian equipped with devastating weaponry and protective armour that takes an age to break down.

Though there's nothing particularly original in the game's overall make-up, Super EDF is blessed with a few nice touches that lift it out of the ordinary. For a start the standard power-up system has been rejected for a more accessible approach. Instead of blasting special aliens that release collectible pods, the player selects his weaponry at the outset of the game while his fighter is still in the hangar. Eight different systems are available, including various cannons, lasers and a few more diverse set-ups.

Apart from the standard deviations in weapon performance (some home in on their targets, others split up like fragmentation bomblets), each system differs in terms of power, speed and rapid-fire ability. The specifications of each weapon are available from the selection screen, allowing the player to choose the gun which suits him best. The more powerful guns, for instance, fire quite slowly, while the really fast rapid-fire setups inflict minimal damage.







(Top) Select your weapon from the eight available before setting sail against the alien hordes.

(Middle) Level One's end-of-level baddy comes in for some stick. The trick is to destroy it before it starts shucking laser bolts at you.

(Above) Night-time action in Level Two - no time to admire the scenery, there's killing to be done!

Once in the air, the fighter's weaponry can be changed again. A quick slap on the definable 'formation' button alters the way in which the weapon behaves. With the formation altered, the firepower is divided up and sprayed around the screen, allowing for more widespread, if less accurate, carnage. The exact change differs from weapon to weapon, but you get the general idea.

Equally agreeable is the shield-energy system, giving the player a better chance of success, and serving to keep the action flowing all the time, rather than stopping and re-starting when hit by a laser shot or enemy ship. There's also a rather smart distance meter, which shows how much further the player has to go before the end of the level. It's the rather thoughtful little bits like this that make Super E.D.F. one of the better console shoot-'em-ups.

But is it better than Super R-Type? Well, yes, it is actually, because it doesn't slow down as much. Better than UN Squadron? Hmmm... that's a tricky one. Suffice to say that all Famicom-owning action freaks shouldn't hesitate in adding this to their collection. We're still waiting to see Nintendo's little marvel pushed to its limit, but until that day comes this'll do nicely, thank you.

● Gary Whitta

SUPER FAMICOM

£49.99

OUT NOW

Excellent weapon system.

Classy backdrops and music.

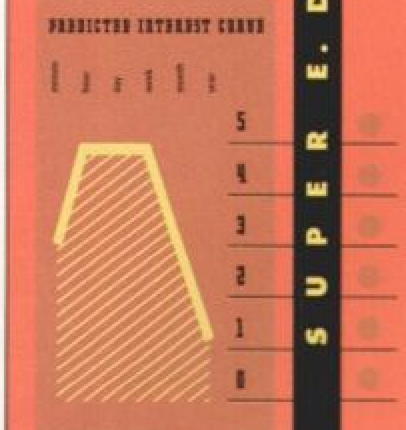
Could have been significantly more violent.

Sprites are a bit on the anorexic side.

850 FAMICOM RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
7	2	7	8

The only thing that prevents the player getting into Super E.D.F. right off the bat is the difficulty - it's a tough game and a good hour's practice, coupled with experimentation with the various weapon systems, is required before it all starts happening, man. The catchy music and luvvly backdrops do a good job of keeping the player engaged, and a variable difficulty setting ensures that interest isn't likely to lapse for quite a while. Good clean fun throughout.



SUPER E.D.F. RATINGS

MEGAMAN

PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

Wa-hey! Mega Man's on the Gameboy! Dr Wily, smarting from his defeat at the hands of Mega Man on the NES cart, has plotted his evil revenge. With the aid of his misguided genius, the mad scientist has resurrected eight of the Robot Masters that Mega Man scrapped in their earlier encounter and placed them in a series of mazes laced with traps and deadly devices. Mega Man must enter the mazes, find the Robot Master in each and destroy them, before finally facing Dr Wily in his Space Node (whatever that is).

Mega Man is basically a platform game with a hint of shoot-'em-up stirred in to add spice. Mega Man starts of armed with a simple pea-shooter, but by defeating a Robot Master he adds their weapon to his armoury (and these can be cycled through using the SELECT key). The Masters are more vulnerable to certain weapons, so there's an (small) element of strategy in deciding which order to tackle them.

The best thing about Mega Man is that it's so bloomin' playable. Control over The Man is excellent, and the action is fast, furious and graphically clear (the sprites are great). The only downer is the game's difficulty - it's very. Still, provided you don't mind a challenge - and playing one of the best platform-style games to appear on the Gameboy since Batman - this is an excellent buy. So go and get it.

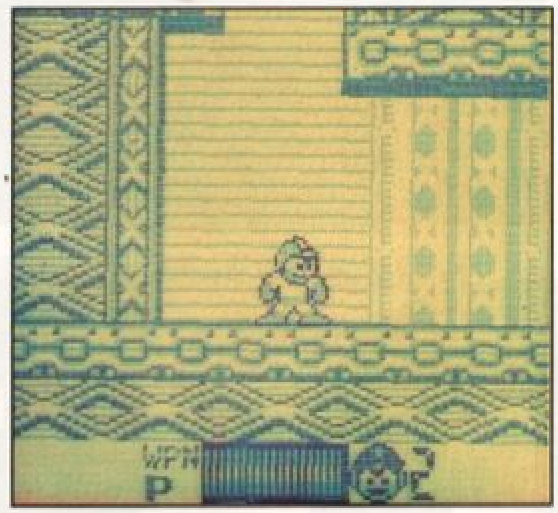
● **David Upchurch**

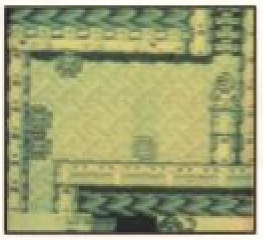
👍 Large yet uncluttered graphics.

Addictive and challenging.

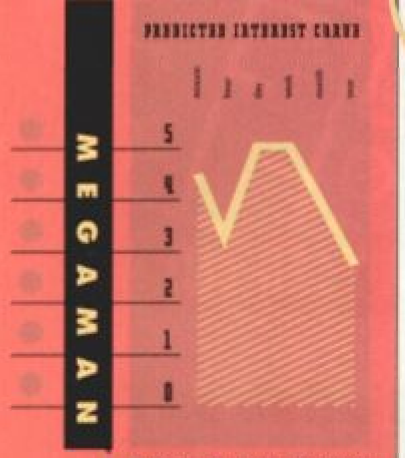
Plenty of variety.

👎 Tough verging on frustrating.





MEGAMAN RATINGS



By giving the player the chance to enter four of the nine levels right from the start, there's lots of fun to be had from just idly looking around. It's only once the player actually gets down to the task of actually trying to beat the game that a big problem presents itself - Mega Man is Mega Tuff! Fortunately, the gameplay is addictive enough to pull you through the bad times. The difficulty actually turns out to be a bonus in the long run, making this one of the longer lasting carts about - sort of the software world equivalent of a Twix.

G	IO	A	FF
10	4	8	9

GAMEBOY RATING 898

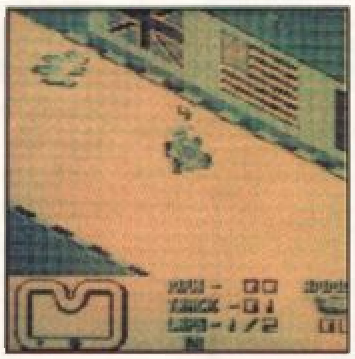
SUPER R.C. PRO-AM

The NES hit makes it way on to the Gameboy and, it has to be said, in some style. The game centres around a race between four cars on a series of twenty-four courses. The player's aim is simple - qualify (and go on to the next course) by coming anywhere except last. Each track is a driver's nightmare of bends, puddles and oil slicks, which soon have the car skidding out of control and invariably straight into the crash barriers - and though at first it seems as if there's nothing the player can do to avoid such game-losing predicaments, practice, as they say, reaps its own reward. It's a shame that later courses don't introduce, say, jumps or ramps, but then you can't have everything.

To help the player there are bonuses littering the tracks, including chevrons which give the car a brief but astonishing speed boost and roll cages which prevent the car exploding if it spins off the track. Most valuable are the bombs and missiles, which the player can use to blow his opponents off the track. In addition, letters can be collected, and when they spell 'NINTENDO' the player's car is upgraded to a faster, sexier, straight-off-the-ramp model.

The game's most exciting feature is the ability to link up to two machines via the standard head-to-head cable, or up to four with the add-on adaptor. This transforms the game from a fun diversion into an addictive obsession. It's amazing how these games bring out the competitive streak in everyone, with even the normally most-timid gamer suddenly leaping up and stomping around the room screaming "I am victorious" when a race has been won.

● **David Upchurch**



👍 Attractive scrolling graphics.

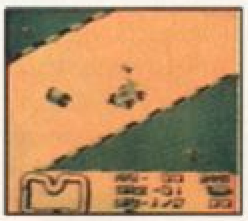
Satisfying control over car.

Long-term challenge.

👎 Annoyingly grating sound.

Courses lack variety.

PRICE
£24.99
(Import)

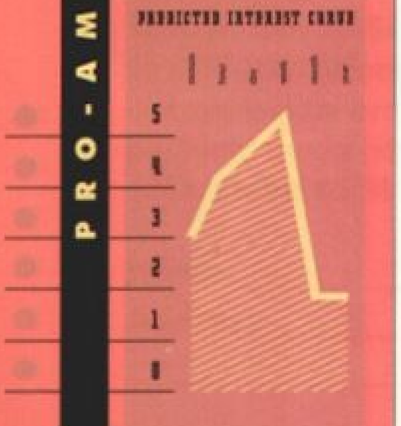


GAMEBOY RATING 887

G	IO	A	FF
9	2	4	9

Pro-Am's slipping and sliding control is a bit frustrating at first. However, once mastered it's actually a positive feature, allowing the player to make lots of neat swerving corners and tricky manouevres. The twenty-four courses make for a long-lasting and addictive challenge, but there's a good chance that the fun may wear thin long before Championship status is reached. However, Pro-Am's one of those game's that you'll tire of in a couple of months, but strangely find yourself drawn back to in a year's time. All in all, a worthy purchase, espe-

PRO-AM RATINGS



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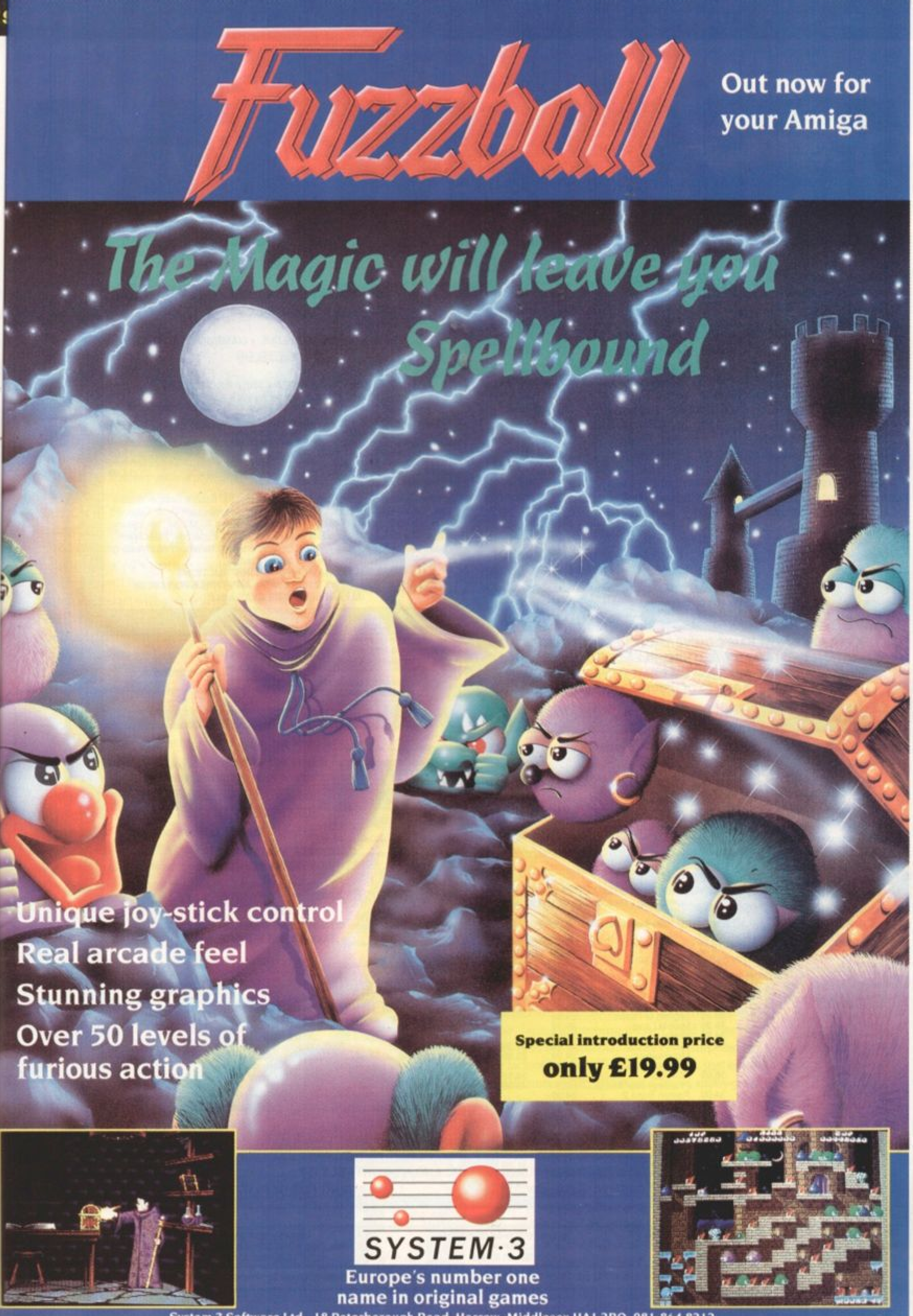
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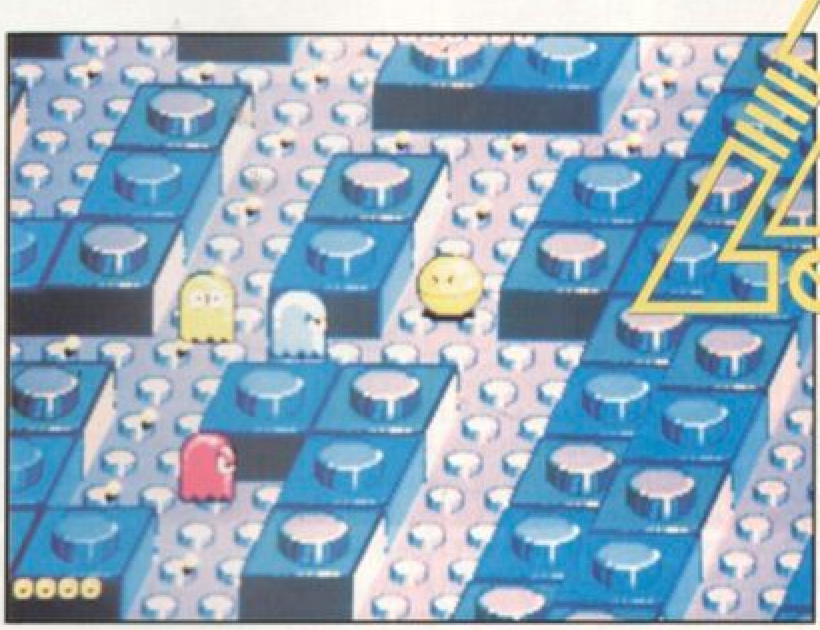
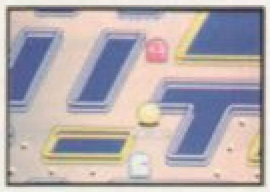
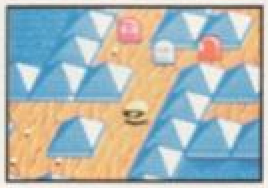
PACMANIA



(Above) Wacca Wacca! Things aren't so tough among the lego bricks of Blocktown, where the maze layout is simple and the ghosts are decidedly dumb. Easy peasy!

(Below) Inky, Blinky and co. get smarter as Paccy progresses through the levels. Once you get to he jungle level, it's like the have PhD's in advanced chasing!





There seems to be a craze at the moment for updating classic games- Defender and Space Invaders have both had fairly recent facelifts, and Apocalypse from Image Works is very similar to Choplifter. And now Tengen are treating us to another slice of the early eighties with a 3-D version of Pacman- Pacmania. Hooray!

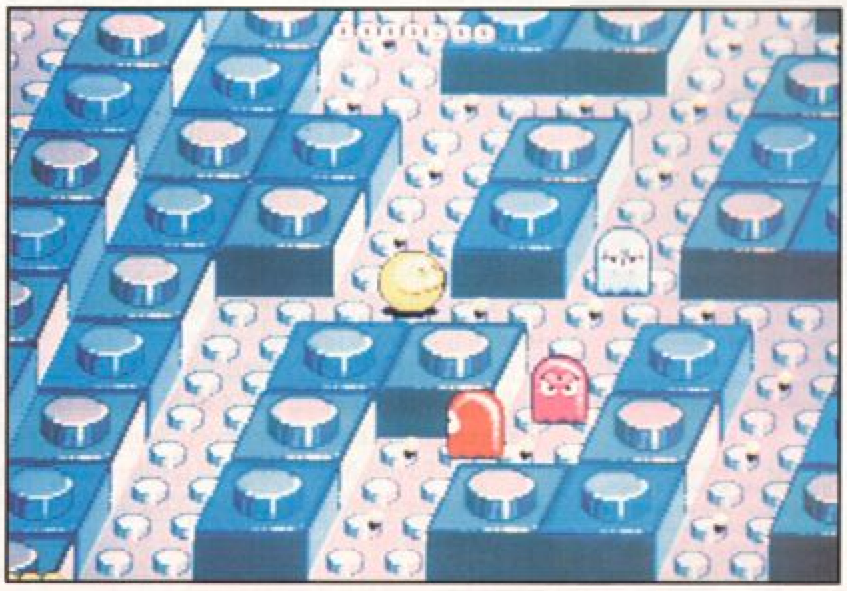
The aim of the game in Pacmania is just that of the original; you, as a hungry yellow ball must speed around a variety of maze like complexes, munching the little yellow pills that are scattered around . As you do, you will be pursued by ghosts who, upon coming in contact with you, will use up one of your (five) lives. You can however eat special power up pills, bigger and more scarce than your ordinary pill, to turn the tables and eat the ghosts for a limited period of time. Upon being eaten, the spectres will return to their 'hideout' and regenerate themselves, ready to kill you again, the blighters!

Once you have stuffed yourself with all the pills to be had in the maze you're in, you are supplied with a hefty points bonus and transported to the next stage- which is exactly the same as the one you've just completed, only a different colour. After that you may proceed to the next world, of which their are four- Block Town, The Pacman Theatre, Sandbox World and the Jungly Steps. Pacmania's front end allows you to choose where you'd like to begin out of the first three; to enter the Jungly Steps you must complete Sandbox World. The frontend also allows you to set the difficulty setting and your preffered arrangement for the speed inducing 'power pac'- you can have it always off, always on, or implemented in-game at the touch of a button. So- eat pills, avoid/eat ghosts and complete all four levels to finally return to Blocktown and begin again on a slightly harder setting.

And that's it. Pacman was unbelievably addictive- even my mum used to sneak goes on it and this game could have been easily as good, but is let down by of a few very irritating flaws. The graphics serve their purpose but in no way suggest Megadrive quality. The same is true of the annoying sound- a different but equally irritating ditty plays through all four levels, so it's a good job there is an option to turn it off. But the graphics are the biggest disappointment of the two- check out the screenshots. Ugh! Amstrad CPC64 revisited, complete with ropey collision detection and jerky scrolling. Indeed the presentation throughout is decidedly lacking.

But hey, graphics and sound don't mean anything, as long as the gameplay's there- and with Pacmania gamepley is very, er, dull. At times the controls are disastrously unresponsive- many a time, facing a jumping ghost I tried to flee- in vein. And the gameplay is heavily hampered by the lack of levels- only (pah!) four! It's just completely unrealistic, and it won't hold many people's attention span for long.

Despite all this, some of classic Pacman's playability manages to shine through, especially on 'crazy" (ie. very fast) mode. This is not enough though to reproduce Master System pacmania, which was excellent. Tengen might seriously expect someone to stump up thirty five quid for this contrived old scrap, but I don't



●David Fitzgerald

£49.99

OUT NOW

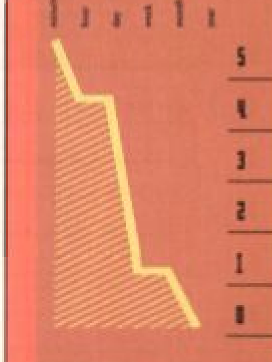
A touch of Pacman's original gameplay.	Graphics, sound, lack of levels, bad collision detection, jerky scrolling, poor control.

850 MEGADRIVE RATING

G	IQ	A	FF
4	5	4	5

All right, all right, you will play it quite consistently for a few days, intermittently howling with frustration, and after a little whije you'll give up on it.Bland graphics, bland sound, bland gameplay, bland presentation, bland...(etc). what rot! Pacmania is a wasted opportunity to bring a classic game to the Megadrive- perhaps if Tecmagik had overseen the conversion, this review would have been a much more admiring affair. But they didn't, so this isn't.

PREDICTED INTEREST CURVE



PACMANIA RATINGS

QUACKSHOT

Waaack! Old Donald Duck, eh? He may have a temper shorter than a pygmy's parts, but you can't help loving him. At least, that's what Disney think. Personally, I think he's about as funny as trapping your fingers in a door, but then what do I know? Umpteen million kids around the world can't be wrong. At least he's got a bit of pep, I suppose, which is more than can be said for most of Disney's saccharine-sweet but bland-as-blancmange cartoon characters.

For his first Megadrive outing, Sega have opted to put Donald in a platform game, much like they did with Mickey Mouse and the *Castle of Illusion*. It's a pity that Sega don't try different genres, though I guess that a Disney-based shoot-'em-up is pretty much out of the question. Pity - the thought of blasting seven bells out of Goofy, Minnie, Pluto *et al* is quite appealing.

But as long as the games are of the same high quality of this one, I shouldn't complain too loudly. As it turns out Quackshot is one of the best platform capers to appear in a long, long time. The nicely-presented cartoony intro explains the plot - while snooping around Uncle Scrooge's vast library, Donald discovers an ancient long-lost treasure map. Lured by the promise of wealth beyond even the imaginings of his Uncle, Donald sets off on an around the world treasure trail. Unfortunately Big Bad Pete and his gang hear about the hidden loot, and set off in pursuit too.

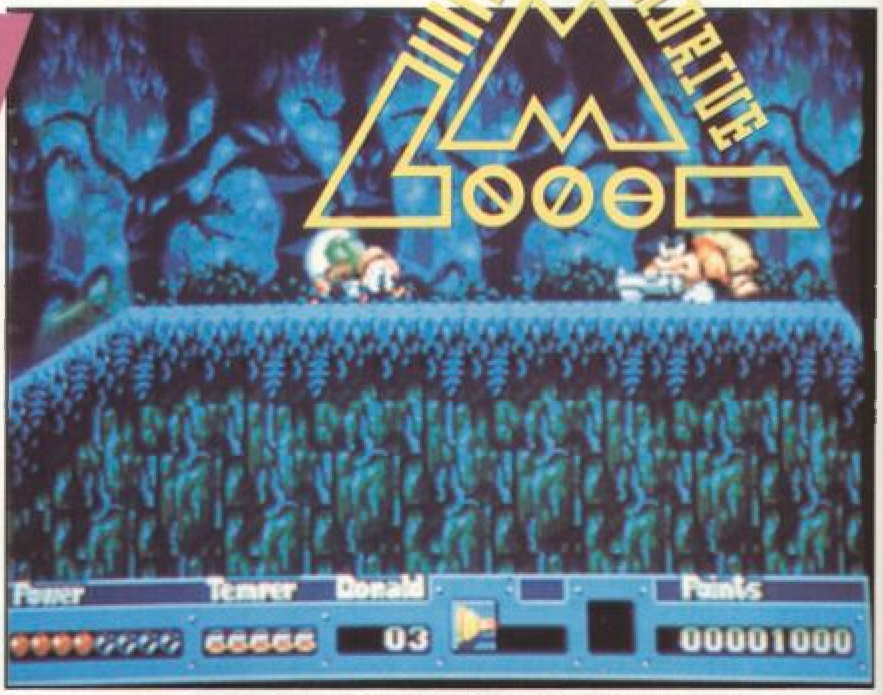
At the start of the game the player is presented with a map, and the player can choose to fly to several locations marked on it. Having made his choice, Donald is dropped off by Huey, Dewey and Louie in their fat red biplane and the game proper can begin. It's a sideways-scrolling platform affair, with Donald able to jump, crouch and crawl around the landscapes, each packed with lifts, warp doors, quicksand and all manner of perils.

With his sink-plunger gun Donald can stun Pete and his cronies, in some cases allowing him to use them as stepping stones to higher platforms. As he progresses, Donald discovers three other weapons - a super-sucky plunger gun which he can use to climb up walls; a pop gun that sprays corn kernels is all directions; and a block-blastin' bubble-gum gun. The player can cycle through the weapons at will, and select the best one for the current situation.

However, it's a bit more complex than that. On each level Donald will come across one of his friends who will either give him a gift to help him complete his quest or ask him for something before they'll let him pass. Donald then has to go off to another location and try to locate the required item so that he can continue. This *Cluedo*-style deductive element adds a small but nice amount of depth to the game, and prevents it just being another 'complete the levels one after the other' job.

Quackshot proves that anything Mickey can do, Donald can do better. Not only does Quackshot play like a dreamy treat, the gameplay is constantly changing, providing a constant and deeply enjoyable callenge. It's also got some of the best graphics and sound that the 'Drive's ever produced. And, unlike 99.8% (precisely) of most 'Drive games, it actually takes more than an afternoon to complete. I'd rather play this instead of *Castle of Illusion* or, for that matter, the hugely over-rated *Sonic* any day of the week. So this Xmas, forget Hype the Hedgehog and plug the Duck in your slot. You'd have to be quackers not to.

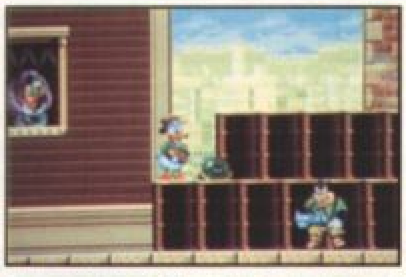
● David Upchurch

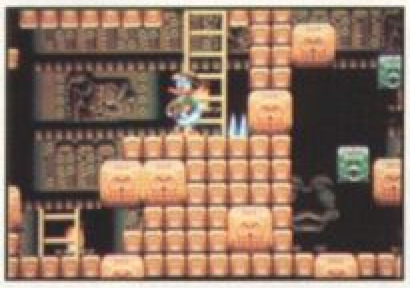


Duck, you... er... Duck! In the heart of Transylvania, one of Big Bad Pete's cronies crouches down to take aim at everyone's favourite foul-tempered fowl. Donald has three weapons with which he can return fire - a literally stunning sink plunger gun, a popcorn caster and a bubble gum blower. Each has limited ammo, and must be used carefully.

GREY CLOUD!

There is a mild caveat for owners of Japanese grey-imported Megadrives - the text appears in Japanese, even if you've bought an 'official' cart. Although it doesn't ruin the game, it does mean you have to do a bit more 'trial and error' exploring than normal because you don't know precisely where you're meant to be going.





(Top) More of Pete's henchmen attack in Ducksburg, and those turtles may not be teenage or mutant, but once they duck inside their shells they're impervious to Donald's attacks yet still deadly to the touch.

(Above) In the baking-hot Mexican desert Donald discovers a trap-filled Aztec temple. Here our plucky ducky must avoid all manner of spikes, firepits and falling blocks in his search for the gormless Goofy.

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More depth than most platform games.

Superbly playable.

Brilliant graphics and sound.

A tad slowly paced.

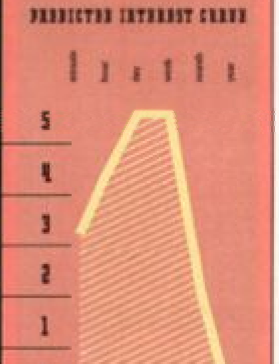
The to-ing and fro-ing can get annoying.

QUACK SHOT RATINGS

FAMICOM RATING 907

G	IQ	A	IT
10	4	9	9

To be honest, it's all a bit confusing at first. You start playing and are just getting into the swing of things when you're stopped by some Disney character saying you can't continue until you've found a certain item. However, this slender arcade adventure element is actually a lot less involved than it first appears and doesn't tarnish the fundamental platform action. Which, it has to be said, is A Very Good Thing, because too much faffing about would have spoiled what is possibly the best platform game on the Megadrive.



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FACTORY PANIC

Strangely cute graphics.

Well-judged difficulty.

Unique and addictive gameplay.

Inability to see whole game area is annoying.

PRICE
£24.99

What a title, eh? Certainly gets the adrenalin rushing, doesn't it? What's next? Bus Shelter Frenzy? Supermarket Nuts? Actually, this rather uninspiring title is a bit unfortunate, because it may put Joe Public off what is actually a right smart little arcade puzzle game.

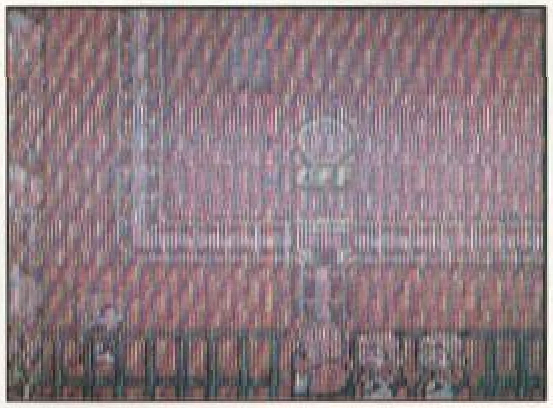
As the name suggests, the game takes place in a factory warehouse. Each room of the warehouse is made up of a network of conveyor belts. The player's job is to convey various essentials (loaves of bread, kebabs, Game Gears) that appear at the top of the screen to a queue of waiting customers at the bottom. The player does this by guiding his on-screen character onto switches which reroute the goodies onto different belts.

ROUND 1 STAGE 1

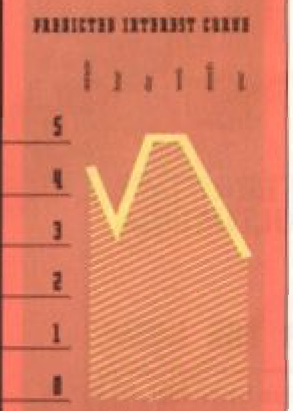
This essentially simple task is, of course, made harder by the manic security guards trying to stop you, and the fact that some of the items are defective and have to be directed to a rubbish bin. It all starts easily, with just three or so people wanting, say, a loaf of bread. But as the game progresses, more and more people join the queue, each demanding specific items, and woe betide you if they're not kept happy.

It takes a bit of playing for Factory Panics true addictive qualities to shine through, and once they do you'll be hooked. Although not the best looking Gear game in the world, at least it's pretty clear what's going on, which is essential in this sort of game. The only niggle is that in the scrolling larger rooms it can be hard planning ahead without a full overview of the belt layout.

● David Upchurch



FACTORY PANIC RATINGS



There's a very strange intro, with the hero running past a line of grey-clad people who look like they're queueing for bread in Russia. Not exactly the jolliest start to a cutesy puzzle game. The gameplay is enjoyable but seems a little simplistic at first - but then things start hotting up and the game really gets its claws into you. If you like your arcade puzzle games with more emphasis on the arcade than the puzzle then you should find this brilliant entertainment, and anyone else should find it pretty good fun too.

7	6	8	9
G	IQ	A	FF

GAMEGEAR RATING 859

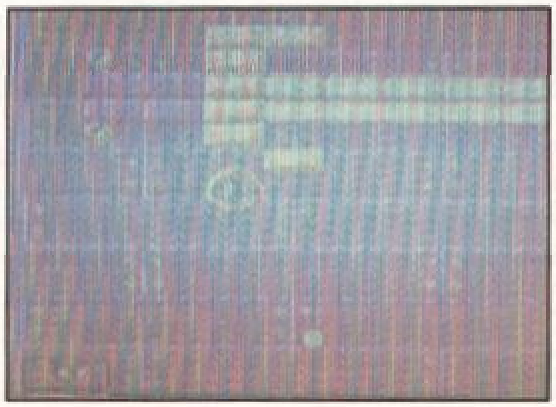
WOODY POP

Reading the scenario for Woody Pop you'd be forgiven for thinking that you're about to play some sort of cutesy platform game. It describes the antics of Woody Pop, an ickle wooden toy, who has to explore the fifty rooms of the big toy shop that has been over-run by all manner of nasty puppets, tin soldiers and clockwork robots. As it turns out, this is actually an Arkanoid clone, and a good one at that.

And for those who have been locked in a dark room by their evil stepmother for the last ten years, by that I mean that this is Breakout with big brassy knobs on. So now we have some bricks that are indestructible, some that require more than one hit to be destroyed and some that drop a power-up when hit, such as lasers, double ball, large bat, etc.

To those that haven't seen this type of game before, it may sound like a classic candidate for the 'nice simple idea spoiled by too much tarting up' school of games, but it actually works very well and its addictive powers will soon have you burning several gallons of midnight oil. The only big drawback for the novice is the fact that the action hots up a bit too quickly - if your reactions are less than lightning fast, you may get very annoyed very quickly.

● David Upchurch



Easy to get into.

Hugely addictive.

Gets very tough.

Overly-strange storyline.

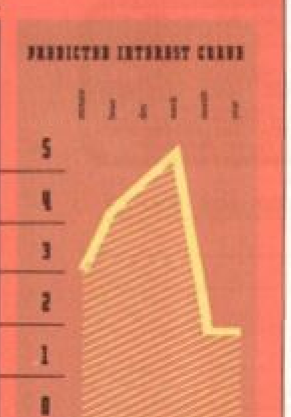
PRICE
£24.99

GAMEGEAR RATING 896

G	IQ	A	FF
6	1	6	10

These games practically define the term 'easy to get into' - after all, what could be easier to comprehend than knocking a ball back and forth with a bat? Great fun, but even on beginner level the difficulty starts building up very quickly, and lightning reactions are needed to survive before you've got even a third of the way into the game. Although the shine wears off after a month or so, you'll probably find yourself strangely drawn back long into the future. Weird, huh?

WOODY POP RATINGS



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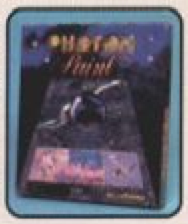

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Next!

Boo! As this issue draws to an end, and we approach the moment when the final credits will slowly roll up the screen, it's true to say that most of the plot development for this particular thriller is done. But you'd be foolish if you're the sort of person who gets up and puts on their coat when you reckon the final twist has been revealed. It's always the smart people who stick it out until the very end.

Indeed, no sooner has our rollicking team of software special agents completed this month's series of dangerous exclusive-gathering assignments, than they're off again, preparing an even more explosive and thrill-packed script for next month's New Year special.

So all the half-wits who have already left to catch the last tube home won't be finding out about the host of exciting features in our next presentation.

Most significantly there will be the ACE Awards, a glittering occasion celebrating the very best software releases of 1991.

And of course, aside from all the tip-top secret things which we can't talk about, there will be the usual supporting cast of exclusive reviews, In the Works, Previews and Tricks'n'Tactics so vital for a well balanced software picture.

So turn to page 108 and utilise our finely crafted Newsagent Reserve coupon, why don't you? You wouldn't want to miss out.

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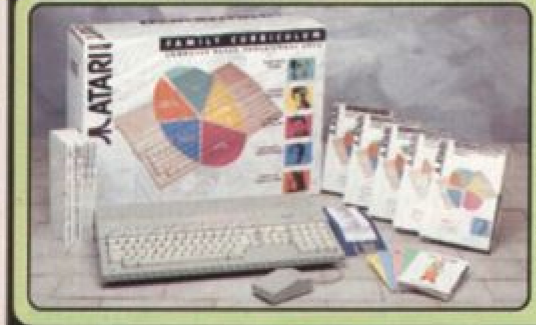

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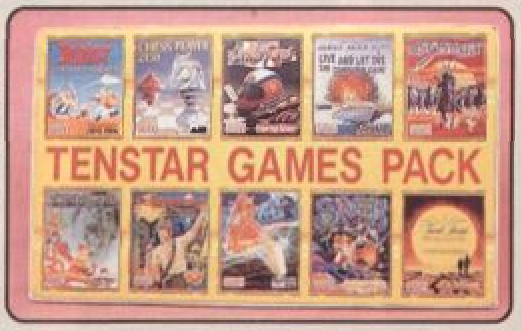

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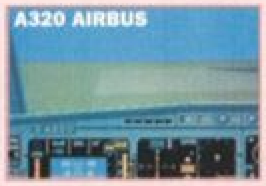
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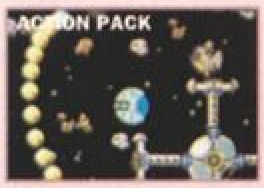
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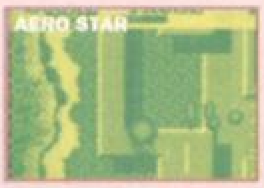
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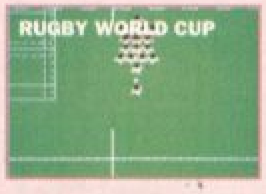
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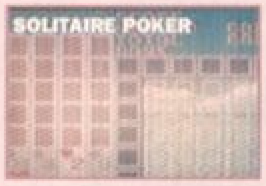
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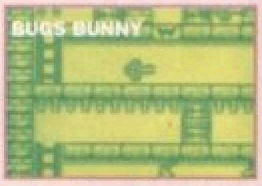
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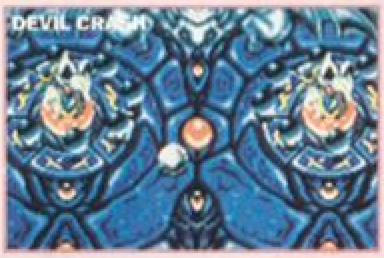
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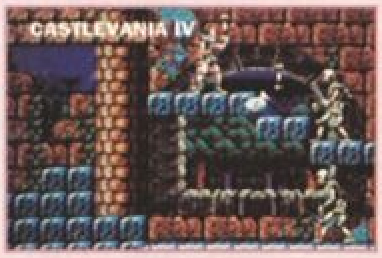
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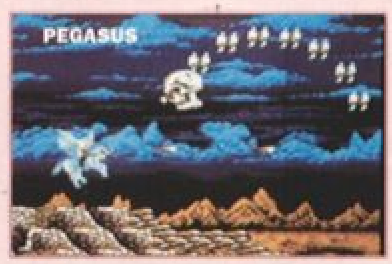
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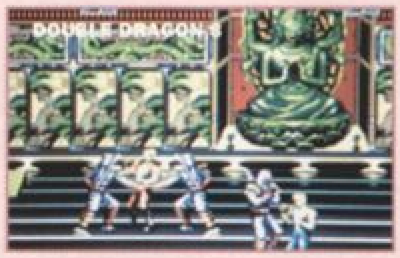
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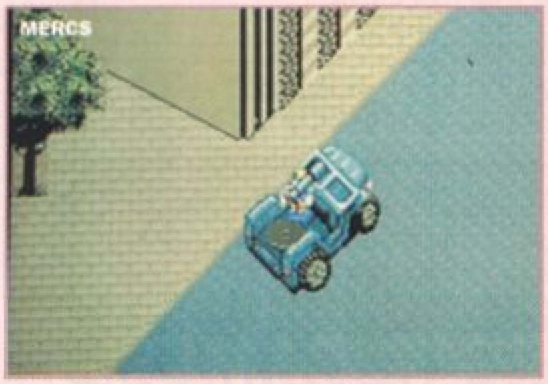
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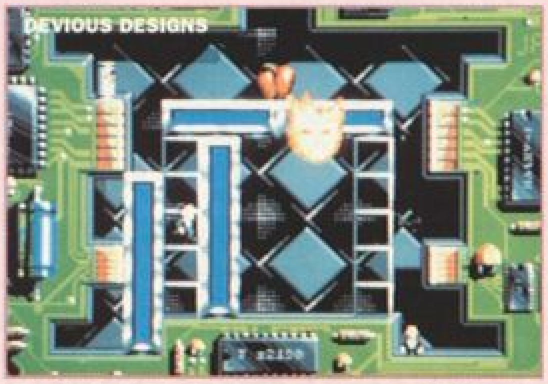
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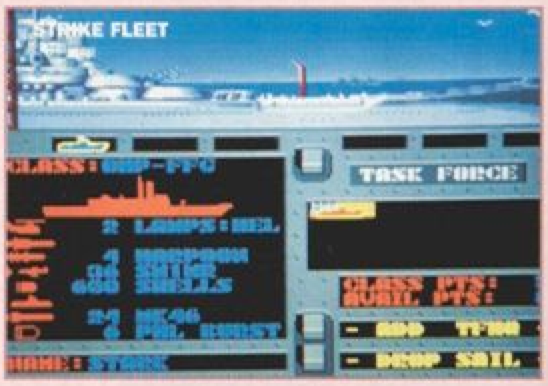
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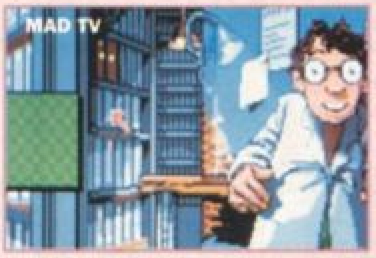
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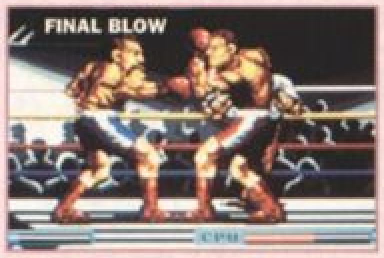
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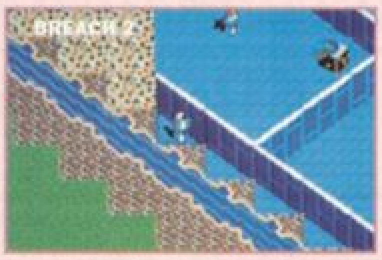
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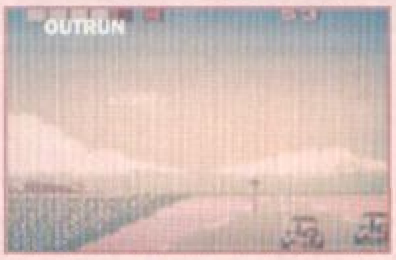
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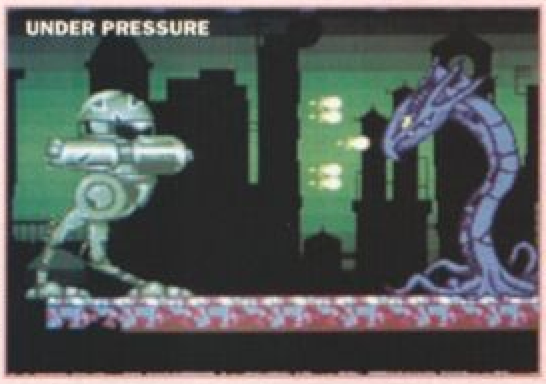
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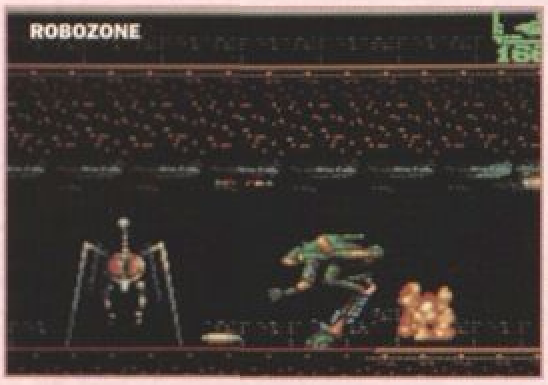
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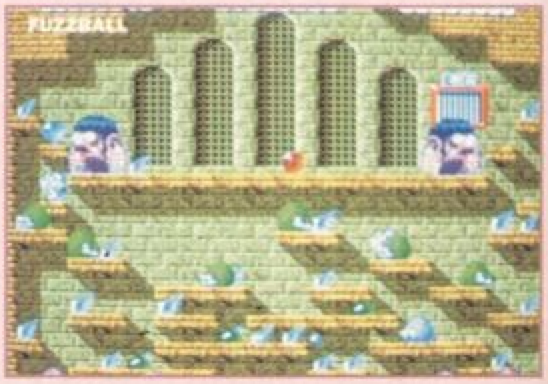
FUZZBALL

new releases

What's this? Colour screenshots on a Pink Page? Whatever next? You may well be amazed, dear reader, because this month our aim to satisfy your thirst for information has led to this infernal invention; an entire page of pictures of every new game reviewed in the Directory. Well, all apart from the ones we forgot to photograph, that is.

reviews directory

Oh dear. Another issue so very nearly over. Well, you should be ashamed of yourselves for thinking such a thing, because this is where the magazine really BEGINS! Well, alright, that isn't strictly the case, but the following thirty pages of hard reviews information should successfully both inform you and help deal with all those WH Smith gift tokens which you'll have received. And quite aside from all that, it's a right good read.

Every game we come across from the finest simulation to the crappiest arcade adventure will eventually turn up in the Directory, so you're never in any doubt about any of the games that you're likely to find in your local computer store.

We hope you enjoy using this buyers guide just as much as we enjoyed putting it together for you.

Oh, while we've got a spare few column inches, we should perhaps give a brief breakdown of the reviews criteria employed in the Directory. As you will have noticed, the games don't receive our usual score out of 1,000. Instead they get a five star rating indicating their quality. This, again, is simply intended to make your browsing activities as painless as possible.

Just in case you were in any doubt, the higher number of stars a game receives, the better we think it is. Don't laugh. You'd be surprised the number of people who can't grasp the simplest system.

So, for the record, here's the breakdown:

☆☆☆☆☆	**Excellent. Buy without hesitation.**
☆☆☆☆	**Pretty smart. A safe bet.**
☆☆☆	**Acceptable, but certainly no world beater.**
☆☆	**Not very good at all.**
☆	**Rubbish.**

And let that be an end of it. So, without further ado, let the big pink carpet unfurl and the Directory begin!

New Releases:

A320 Airbus
Action Pack
Aero Star
Battle Isle
Breach 2
Bugs Bunny
Castlevania IV
Devil Crash
Devious Designs
Double Dragon 3
Fighter Command
Final Blow
Fuzzball
Winter Challenge
Mad TV
Mercs
Outrun
Pegasus
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Rugby World Cup
Solitaire Poker
Strike Fleet
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World Class Rugby

Still Available:

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Rise of the Dragon
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Robocop 3
Rodland
Sarakon
Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe
Seven Colours
Silent Service II
Smash TV
Thunderhawk
Utopia
Volfied
Vroom
Willy Beamish
Wing Commander II

releases

A320 AIRBUS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Thalion**

You what? Alright, it's not as if we have any problem flying high in an F-16 or blowing up radar installations in a state-of-the-art stealthfighter - but the A320 Airbus? Is somebody pulling our pilsner? Well, apparently not, as this is one of the biggest releases from German software house Thalion in quite a while. Rather akin to a computerised Jim'll Fix It, the game allows the player to be an airline pilot for a day - well, for however long he likes, really - at the controls of the little-known A320 jetliner.

As anybody who knows anything about aviation at all will expect, A320 Airbus is no simple game. Passenger jets are impossibly more complicated than the fighter planes that have mainly been the subject of simulations in the past. Thalion's game has attempted to simulate the spaghetti-like complexity as accurately as possible - and for the most part it succeeds, although this hyper-realistic approach is unlikely to appeal to the majority of flight-sim gamers. All those knobs, dials and readouts may be a bit too much for the average Joe Shmoe.

A320 Airbus isn't just about flying about a bit, though. Oooh, no. Players get to create their own pilots, take part in training or active duty, work out flight plans and generally make their way up the ladder of commercial aviation. For those that find this sort of thing appealing, there's no doubt that A320 Airbus is actually very good indeed. It's professionally-produced, apart from the occasionally ropey graphics, and though it's not exactly immediate or instinctive, the rewards are there to be had for players willing to plough the manual and learn all the ins and outs. The only problem is, I can't quite imagine who's going to be that interested, when you think about all the other, considerably more action-orientated, flight games on the market today. It's just horses for courses, I suppose.

☆☆☆☆

ACTION PACK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Compilation**
Publisher **Action 16**

Wot a bargain! Ten games - *Colorado, Cosmic Pirate, Eliminator, Fast Lane, Hostages, Maya, On Safari, Rotor, Sherman M4, Targhan* - for twenty-five quid! Okay, we'll be honest and admit that they're all getting a bit long in the tooth now, and more than a couple of the games on offer here are real Xmas turkey material (*On Safari*, in particular, should be plucked, stuffed with Paxo and bunged in the oven for a good five hours as soon as possible).

However, *Cosmic Pirate* (a supah brill multiway scrolling shoot-'em-up), *Eliminator* (a 3D shoot-'em-up cum driving game) and *Hostages* (a multi-part arcade adventure) more than compensate, and would make a superb value compilation on their own. The other games are poor to middling in quality, but for the price you really can't complain. Highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

AEROSTAR

Price **GameBoy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Vic Tokai**

What do you get if you cross a platform game with a vertically-scrolling shoot-'em-up? A bit of a bloody mess, that's what. Aerostar is a seven-stage blaster where the player has to guide a spaceship along an enemy-held highway. The player can fly into the air for a very limited time to avoid ground fire and hop over gaps in the road, but this makes him vulnerable to attacks from the air. And, of course, there's a plethora of juicy power-ups to be collected along the way that turn the player's craft from something only a little more threatening than a slap in the face into the starship world's equivalent of the 'King of the Beach'.

The idea of combining blasting and bouncing is theoretically good, but unfortunately in practice it doesn't work so well. The player 'jumps' by holding down one of the GameBoy buttons, and the longer the button is held down the longer the jump. Thing is, the GameBoy's design makes it difficult to fire at the same time without taking one finger of the jump button, resulting in the ship plummeting into an abyss. And as the road starts narrowing, and the need for jumping becomes more frequent and the enemy's attacks become more vicious, this becomes particularly annoying.

As it stands, Aerostar is a nice stab at something a bit different, only marred by the slightly clumsy implementation. Worth a look, though, if you're interested by the sound of it.

☆☆☆

BATTLE ISLE

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

As strategy games get trendier and more diverse, with the likes of *Populous, Mega lo Mania* and *Sim City*, the latest from French firm Ubi Soft represents something quite different, which we hardly see any more these days - a wargame in the classic vein. It's set on a far-off world where two armies do battle for control of a series of islands. It's vaguely similar to the old SSI wargames - units move in turns across a battlefield broken down into hexagonal zones. More experienced gamers will know the sort of thing.

Due to the space-age scenario, the units involved consist of all manner of high-tech tanks, planes, ships and armoured vehicles as well as more conventional infantry battalions. Players move their units about, creating tactical formations and assaults, with the inevitable confrontations between opposing forces. As the battle goes on, units must be resupplied, tactics altered and all the other guff that goes along with a game of this type.

Battle Isle's most favourable option is the two-player mode - something that's woefully missing from a lot of strategy products these days. A handy split-screen display allows two mates to play head-to-head - although this does mean you can see what your opponent is up to at any time, of course.

Battle Isle is undoubtedly a fine and very 'deep' strategy game, and one that should appeal to anyone who likes the good old-fashioned ways of doing things, without all the interfering bells and whistles. But despite the game's accessibility, many younger players on the lookout for a brain game are more likely to steer towards the likes of Populous II. Good stuff, though.

☆☆☆☆

BREACH 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

Though there's nothing particularly special on offer for die-hard RPG fans this month, the follow-up to the highly-successful Breach is worthy of their attention. Set in the future with the player in command of a team of space marines, it's more strategy than role-playing, but the mix of the two genres is an appealing one. Probably the best comparison is with that old favourite *Laser Squad* - Breach 2, however, boasts a considerably more sophisticated approach, with a smart isometric viewpoint, much easier command control and more involving missions.

In each mission scenario, the player leads his team through enemy territory, exploring rooms, collecting objects and doing battle with the alien hordes they encounter. In the classic RPG tradition, characters can be tooled up with a huge array of weapons and equipment, including rifles, rocket launchers and bombs, and all the characters come complete with individual attributes and abilities.

An added boon is that, should the player get bored with the multitude of missions available, they can create and edit their own. How many gamers will want to expend this amount of effort (designing a playable mission on any kind of game is no easy task) remains to be seen, however, and you may want to ask yourself if you're ever likely to make use of the feature. But there are enough predesigned missions to make Breach 2 worthwhile even without the editor, and on that score the game should at least be on the 'take a look' list for all RPG/strategy afficionados, if not a definite purchase.

☆☆☆

BUGS BUNNY CRAZY CASTLE 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Kemco-Seika**

Who the Hell is Honey Bunny™? I must be getting old, because I don't remember Bugs™ ever having a soppy girlfriend. It sounds to me like a lame excuse to rehash the old 'girl kidnapped by witch who must be rescued by hero' scenario to me. In this case it's the hideously ugly Witch Hazel™ who's the wrong doer (now her I do remember), and who has whisked Honey™ away to her castle. Bugs™ must rescue her by hunting through 28 huge rooms of platforms, pipes, ladders and Looney Tunes™ characters. Bugs™ must find the hidden keys in each to unlock the door to the next room. By picking up bombs, axes and so on Bugs™ can blow up those darn 'Toons, hack his way through blocked passages, etc, etc .

Although it looks like a platform game, Crazy Castle 2™ actually plays more like a puzzle game. Success is down to using the items you pick up along the way to get past certain obstacles at the correct place and time. And this part of the game is quite fun.

It's the platformy element that ruins the game - Bugs™ moves in big chunks and is hard to control, and all too infuriatingly often you lose a life by bumping into the baddies by accident. Despite it's good graphics, in my opinion Crazy Castles 2™ is a right stinking load of old Crap™.

☆☆

CASTLEVANIA IV

Price **Super Famicom £49.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Konami**

I couldn't believe it when I loaded this up! Imagine it's Christmas (not that difficult really). You're really looking forward to getting a certain present, and you've laid the ground with lots of heavy hints to your parents. Then, on Christmas morning, you get a wrapped gift that looks the same size and shape as the the thing you want. Trouble is, when you open it up there's something totally different inside. Oh, it's a nice enough present all right, just not the one you wanted. Well, that's Castlevania IV. It was great on the NES, brilliant on the Gameboy and, along with CapCom's *Super Ghouls n' Ghosts*, was one on the big anticipated releases on the Super Famicom.

To be fair, Castlevania's a decent enough game - there's lots of running around platforms, ladders and what have you, lots of wopping the bad guys with a giant mace. Unfortunately, what there isn't lots of is fun. The graphics are garish, and the animation is merely perfunctory, with the hero having a

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rather unfortunate shuffling walk that makes him look as if he's got rags tied to his feet and he's trying to polish the floor. If this had appeared before *SGn'G* then it might have received a better reception. As it happens, it didn't, so it hasn't.

☆☆☆

DEVIL CRASH

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Tecno Soft**

Computerised pinball has never been a particularly popular genre - and a quick glance at Devil Crash is enough to make you see why. Ever since the age-old days of *Slamball* and *Time Scanner*, coin-ops and home machines have tried to emulate that seedy tilt-n'-slam pinball feel, but with little success. In theory, it should work excellently, with the binary format allowing for all sorts of tricks and wizardry that wouldn't be possible on a real machine. Unfortunately, no amount of gimmicks can make up for the fact that pinball on a computer screen just doesn't compare to the exhiliration of a real table.

To its credit, Devil Crash actually does a better job than most, with credible ball inertia and plenty of interesting features - the table is some three screens long and packed with all manner of secret rooms, bonuses and other bits. Unfortunately the gothic nature of the graphics (pentangles and mystic runes aplenty) lend a rather depressing and messy feel to the game itself, and as a result it's difficult to really enjoy. Devil Crash is the aesthetic equivalent of a bad headache. Whatever its shortcomings, however, computer pinball has acquired a respectable cult following for itself, and gamers of that persuasion will no doubt find Devil Crash to be one of the more impressive examples of the genre. For the rest of us, however, there are more enjoyable - and less frustrating - bits of plastic on the market.

☆☆☆

DEVIOUS DESIGNS

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Image Works**

Hmmm, not so much devious as simply fiddly. Ever since the world went *Tetris* mad, there's been a steady trickle of arcade puzzlers trying to tap into that elusive addictive ingredient that made Alexey Pajitnov's classic such a wallet-filling money spinner. Devious Designs had more potential than most, but it hasn't quite been realised.

The basic idea is simple enough. The player guides a tiny figure around various landscapes, picking up variously-shaped blocks and trying to slot them onto a transparent template, whilst collecting bonuses, a myriad of power ups and avoiding or shooting the swirling bad guys. All well and good. Ah, but there's more to it than that. On the later levels, the player can make his character walk up the walls and even on the ceiling. And this is where it all starts to fall apart.

Control over the player's character is generally fine, but when near a wall it's all too easy to find yourself clambering up when you didn't want to and not clambering up when you did. Admittedly, given a fair deal of practice the player should be able to compensate for this fiddliness, but in the short-term it mars an otherwise enjoyable and reasonably addictive addition to the genre.

☆☆☆

DOUBLE DRAGON 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Storm**

Double Dragon fans have been more than short-changed in the past by the conversions of the previous two Double Dragon coin ops, so it comes as some relief to be able to say that this - the third instalment of the on-going fisty-cuff escapades of Jimmy and Billy Lee - is, despite a couple of reservations, pretty much what devotees have been waiting for.

The plot is confused to say the least. According to who you listen to, it's either the usual girly rescue mission, or a quest for treasure, or a fight against the 'Ultimate Evil'. No matter - the mechanics remain the say. Jimmy and Billy Lee (a.k.a. players one and two) have to fump and crump their way through fourteen levels of action set in five exotic locations (and as the game progresses you'll discover 'exotic' is an understatement).

Players start the game with fifteen 'coins', and in the shops found en route the player can buy extra lives, weapons, power ups and even some fancy new fighting moves. It's a shame you can't just find weapons along the way, but this coins business does at least adds a game-enhancing strategy element, because the player has to decide how best to spend his cash.

While some may find the gameplay dated and repetitive (a complaint, to be fair, that could be made about most games of this type), those eponymous 'fans of the genre' should be revelling in one of the more exciting and certainly the slickest slices of beat-'em-up action around. And, for my money, it's far better than *Final Fight*.

☆☆☆☆

FIGHTER COMMAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Impressions**

It may be a little late to cash in on Operation Desert Storm, but there can be no doubting Fighter Command's topicality. Set in the present day Middle East, it puts the player in the shiny shoes of an allied air commander who's been given a simple task - kick the stuffing out of the aggressive enemy as quickly and violently as possible. But despite the pretty picture of a jet pilot coming into land on the box, there's not actually any flight-sim type action in the game at all. It's 100% pure strategy, with the player making all his decisions from a series of control rooms, screens and offices. Everything is presented by simplistic overhead camera views, tactical screens and radar displays.

Everything you'd expect from a military strategy game is in there - you sweep the area with reconnaissance satellites to find out where everything is, then organise and launch attacks against chosen targets. There's a wide range of kit available, including stealth bombers, fighters and helicopters from various air forces along with exocet, patriot and scud missiles. As the game progresses, the player has to keep tabs on political developments, fuel and equipment resources and all kinds of other factors which govern the game world.

Actually, considering there's rarely anything really exciting going on on-screen, Fighter Command does quite a good job of holding the player's attention. Most of the screens are static, nothing's really very immediate and it takes time to learn the basics, but despite all this it's still strangely compelling. There's plenty to do, lots of strategy to get the head round and generally it's all very jolly. The lack of any real flight action is a major setback, and it's because of this that many gamers may prefer to wait for Microprose's forthcoming *ATAC*. In The Works'd this month.

☆☆☆

FINAL BLOW

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Storm**

I actually went to a boxing match a couple of months back and people in the crowd were genuinely shouting "Hit him!" as if it was some sort of useful tactic which their chosen fighter should employ. One suspects those are exactly the sort of folks who spend more than a couple of quid on Final Blow in the arcades. Nothing wrong with the celebration of the noble art, and nothing wrong with having a right old clanging session in the process, but Final Blow has more to do with seeing who can hit Fire the fastest than boxing.

Although the players are endowed with plenty of moves and the ability to block punches, the speed of the game completely removes any sort of finesse which, after all, is what boxing is all about. Even Mike Tyson would concentrate on different areas of the body. Hit them in the ribs enough to make them lower their guard, and then go to work on their face. No such accuracy in Final Blow, since the flurry of computerised and human arms makes it impossible to see who's arms are who's. The result is a non-stop battle of stick-slamming frustration. About the only way to work out who's being hit is by watching the energy bar at the bottom of the screen.

So far as a coin-op conversion goes, it's a pretty good job, and in two-player mode it's alright for a laugh, but the original was far from perfect. Amiga owners may be wise to hold on for a more rounded game.

☆☆☆

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Price **Amiga £19.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, this is a bit of class from the past and no mistake. Refreshingly free from pretension, System 3's latest is a simple yet hugely addictive platform affair. The player controls a bouncing ball of fluff that has to be guided around a network of platforms, collecting fruity bonuses. Enemy sprites, the Fuzzballs of the title, try to stop him. These come in four increasingly-aggressive 'flavours': green, purple, black and red. By repeatedly shooting them with his blob gun, the player can stun them long enough to knock them off the platform. However, if the player takes too long the Fuzzball comes to but even nastier than before.

As the player progresses through the fifty-odd levels more and badder Fuzzballs appear, unkillable monsters start bouncing around and the platform leaps provide an even greater test of the player's pixel-perfect positioning powers. Fuzzball is a classic example of 'simple being good'. The addictive, uncluttered gameplay and cute graphics make this an A-grade winner. And there's a right dreamy animated intro to boot. (Well, you've got to fill those big boxes with something, haven't you?)

☆☆☆☆☆

THE GAMES - WINTER CHALLENGE

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publsiher **Accolade**

This is, as our rad friends would say, mega-wicked! It appeared in the post, totally unexpected, and turns out to be one of the best games we've seen this month! Yeah, seriously! The player (or players - up to ten can take part) compete in eight winter sports - luge, downhill skating, cross-country skating, speed skating, bobsled, giant slalom, biathlon and ski jump. All the events are depicted in an effective mix of 3D polygons for the landscape (a bit like *Midwinter*) with sprites for the competitors and course scenery (trees, fences, etc). Sound is less impressive - on a basic PC the game is played almost in silence except for a between-game tune and a crowd cheer when a player completes an event.

The player views the action from just behind and above his on-screen alter-ego, therefore getting a good view of the action as well as an excellent first-person impression of speed. Each of the events is relatively easy to control and consequently very easy to get into. Like the Epyx *'Games'* series, success is dependent on timing and control rather than hammering the fire button, so it's very satisfying to play and makes shaving seconds off those best times more a matter of skill as opposed to physical stamina.

Despite its superior qualities, The Games may get a bit dull when played alone (a criticism levelled at nearly every game of this type). However, as a game to play with a group of friends it's near flawless - and that makes The Games a more than worthy purchase to play over this Xmas holiday period.

☆☆☆☆☆

MAD TV

Price **IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Strategy.**
Publisher **Rainbow Arts**

My, what timing! Only weeks after the big TV franchise debacle and as the country quakes in dread at the threat of a load of old Spanish comedies and crappy game shows filling our screens, Rainbow Arts produce a game which is all about running your own TV station! If only the geezers at TV-AM had the chance to play Mad TV, they might still be in business.

Not only is Mad TV a right laugh, allowing the player to have total control (with the only limiting factor being the budget) over an entire TV station, but it's an excellent strategy game into the bargain.

The aim is to keep Mad TV at the top of the TV ratings while simultaneously winning the heart of Betty, the most beautiful woman in town. Taking place in a huge skyscraper, the game has the player's character haring around from the various offices, buying up films, scheduling programs and keeping an eye on the all important viewing figures.

Every now and again, your boss will crop up and give you some helpful pointers. He may be keen that his station win an award for poncey art films, so it's up to you to schedule accordingly. Now all of this would be a good enough hoot on it's own, but when you consider that Mad TV is a pretty excellent strategy game with complicated interrelations between various departments and some top notch presentation to boot, you would have to conclude that you'd be mad, ha-bleeding-ha, to miss it.

☆☆☆☆

MERCS

Price **Megadrive £39.99 (Import)**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Sega**

As if Megadrive owners hadn't had quite enough shoot-it-out blasts to keep them happy well into the next century, here's another chance to hammer the joypad. The player must team up with a bullet-headed mate and raid increasingly well defended enemy installations in your mission to rescue the President. Even the smooth top-down multi-directional scrolling and plentiful power-ups fail to elevate Mercs above the rank and file of shoot-'em-ups. Solo play is available for soldiers of fortune who prefer to go-it-alone (or who haven't got any friends) but the thrill factor of such missions is really pretty limited.

Equipped with initially weedy weapons, the over-muscled heroes must gradually work their way up the screen, picking off rebel soldiers both on foot or lurking in gun towers or jeeps. Extra firepower and strength replenishers can be had by destroying the numerous crates lying about.

Players can speed their progress through the frequently tiresome levels by jumping into a semi-burned out jeep and roaring up the screen. This bit is quite amusing, as you can run down the enemy soldiers or blast them with the jeep's in-built bazooka.

As well as the requisite end-of-level guardians (which here take the form of an assortment of military hardware - planes, helicopters, tanks, etc) the levels are reasonably well broken up with bigger foes in the shape of guntowers, machine gun nests and the like.

Aside from the problems thrown up when a game controlled by the joypad necessitates diagonal firing (the enemy troops always seem to attack on a diagonal) Mercs has a brace of other inadequacies up its sleeve. It looks poor, offers absolutely no originality and when played solo is a crushing bore.

☆☆

OUTRUN

Price **Game Gear £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Sega**

It may be an oldy but it certainly isn't a goldy - at least, not in its Gear incarnation it isn't. Out Run is arcade racing action stripped down to its basics - the player has to drive a red Ferrarri through four stages, avoiding other traffic and those pesky stationary roadside obstacles. It's all against the clock, with the player being awarded precious extra seconds every time he completes one of the stages. And... er... that's just about it.

The impression of speed (achieved using good ol' colour banding) is fine, although the objects grow in an annoyingly coarse and chunky fashion. Unfortunately the number of roadsign objects is small, and the number of cars on the road even smaller - even on the hardest stage I only counted two other vehicles on the road at tops. Very poor. Worst of all it's ridiculously easy - I completed the game on my third go. Yes, really! The only real mark in the game's favour is the ability to play head-to-head with another Gear owner, but even then the thrills are few and far between. Not good.

☆☆

PEGASUS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

Oh deary deary dear. What a shame that just when Gremlin starts getting a good reputation for itself with its classy product of late, it turns out a piece of tripe like this. Based very loosely on the classic Greek myth, Pegasus is a weird half-and-half mix of *R-Type* style shoot-'em-up action and run-along-and-chop-up-the-baddies platform stuff. This mixture of airborne and ground-based action is supposed to give the player variety and keep him interest. In practice all it does it get very boring very quickly.

In the shoot-'em-up section, Perseus (or Percius, as the box incorrectly spells his name) flies along on the back of the mythical winged horse, which is animated in an atrociously unconvincing manner, and blasts away at

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the attacking gargoyles, demons, harpies, etc. When he's survived this onslaught, Pegasus lands, Perseus dismounts and the ground section begins. This happens 50 times (25 air sections, 25 on the ground), by which time the player has probably torn all his hair out, kicked in the TV screen and lobbed his computer out of the window.

It's not that Pegasus is a bad idea - it's just that it's been executed in a such a God-awful lazy and unimaginative manner. The action in the horsey bits is sluggish and annoying, while the ground levels lack any of the finesse of, say, *Switchblade II*. The fact that there's lots of it doesn't make it any more of a viable purchase - unless you're a masochist of course. Complete with all manner of intolerable spelling mistakes within the game ("existance" instead of "existence", "new" instead of "knew"), Pegasus would have only just made the grade two years ago, or on public domain today. To ask £26 quid for it when it falls so horribly below today's standards of graphics and gameplay is a bit on an insult. Avoid.

☆☆

ROBOZONE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Image Works**

Trying to hop onto the Green bandwagon (and missing by about six months), Imagework's latest and certainly not greatest puts the player in the driving seat of a giant two-legged war machine, a sort of cut-price version of the one in Psygnosis' *Killing Game Show*, with a mission to put an end to pollution. Hoorah!.

Fundamentally Robozone's a simple blast-anything-that-moves affair, with the programmers trying to maintain player interest by constantly changing the play style. One level's a side-viewed multidirectional-scrolling explore-n'-shoot, the second's much the same but in 3D and the third's a horizontally scrolling shoot-'em-up. While each is programmed well enough, there's precious little fun or excitement to be found in any of them.

The really annoying thing about Robozone is it's pretense to being 'Green' - the manual is littered with Top Tips about how to help save the environment. One states pompously: "If you have a choice, avoid buying packaged goods." Considering that Robozone comes in a giant box with a single disc and a thin manual rattling about inside, the irony of this statement beggars belief. Probably the best tip is the first one: "Try not to waste energy." Imageworks, having played this I already have.

☆☆

RUGBY - THE WORLD CUP

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Domark**

Hey! It's *Scrum Off!* Well, not quite, but it is a pretty blatant attempt by the Doms to adapt Anco's footy classic style to the rough n' tumble, if you will, 'world' of rugby. Of course, as any fule kno, rugby and football are very different sports, with the former lacking the non-stop speed of the latter. Not, then, perhaps the best game to try to shrink to fit into *Kick Off*'s hard and fast playing style.

However, as it 'appens, it all works pretty well. Sure, the action is a bit stop and start, but there is a definite flow to the game and few lapses in pace. The game is viewed in plan view, with the pitch scrolling to follow the player's... er... player (who is, natch, the one nearest the ball). Throws and kicks are controlled simply by the joystick, and it lacks the subtlety of *Kick Off* (no aftertouch here). Scrums are a case of frantically waggling the joystick to force the opposition back, and this is fine - unless you're playing the All Blacks, in which case you need to waggle a sub-light speeds to beat them.

In fact, that's probably the biggest criticism - the top teams are too tough. There are other minor niggles, such as the way player sprites overlap on top of each other and the way that the other members of the team don't put themselves in good positions to pass, meaning that play often revolves one-man rushes from mid-way down the pitch to the try line. But while Rugby may not be perfect, it's still a pretty good 'try'. (Cue sound of reviewer being shot.)

☆☆☆☆

SOLITAIRE POKER

Price **Game Gear £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Sega**

Everyone loves a good puzzle game, and this is a very good one. The aim is simple - select a card from one of the four piles on offer, and place it on a 5 x 5 grid. Points are awarded for pairs, flushes, etc, created either vertically, horizontally or along the main diagonals. Score over a certain amount and the player progesses on to the next, tougher level. There are a number of variants on the theme, but that's the main thrust of the game.

What more is there to say about such a simple concept? Aesthetically it's fine - the functional graphics are clear and colourful and there's a vast number of background tunettes to pick between. Although not exactly using the full-colour LCD capabilities of the Gear to it's fullest, it's one of the most enjoyable Gear games I've seen for a long, long time, and as such comes with a strong recommendation.

☆☆☆☆☆

STRIKE FLEET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Strike Fleet doesn't look the most inspiring game from the shots on the back of the box, but the Lucasfilm credit hints that this may be better than it appears. As, in fact, it is. The game is a sea-based strategy game split into fourteen individual missions or a more-taxing eight-mission campaign. After each mission briefing, the player is allocated a number of points (depending on the difficulty of the mission) to 'spend' in the shipyard. Each ship 'costs' a certain number of points depending on its class, so the player must be careful in picking a balanced fleet.

Once at sea, the player can flick between the ships at will. Control is relatively simplistic (thankfully), allowing the player to steer, change speed, activate radar and sonar and, of course, fire the variety of on-board weapons. In addition, certain ships carry a complement of helicopter that can be sent on recces or sub-hunting forays.

Despite it's initially drab appearance, Strike Fleet actually turns out to be quite involving. There's a great deal of satisfaction to be had from successfully controlling the fleet, and seeing off the air, sea or underwater attacks provides frequent doses of adrenalin. Admittedly, those without a strategic leaning are unlikely to be converted by the game's charms, but if Strike Fleet sounds at least slightly appealing give it a go. I think you'll be surprised.

☆☆☆☆

UNDER PRESSURE

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Oops. Funny how one minute you're on top of the world and the next you're, erm, not. A situation which top notch programmers Eldritch the Cat have found themselves in with their latest release, Under Pressure. Their last and indeed only release, *Projectyle* was exceedingly well received, being a pretty excellent sports sim, but Heaven only knows what gremlins and glitches are to blame for this disaster.

Styled in an uncomfortably similar fashion to Psygnosis games (the in-between level text is virtually identical to Psygy's game name text and the robot which the player controls looks exceedingly like the creature on the *Shadow of the Beast* box), Under Pressure falls down in almost every single respect.

Guiding a huge robotic killing machine through a bunch of decaying cityscapes, the player must duel with a myriad of different monsters - mainly snakes - with the impressive arsenal of weaponry available from his cockpit.

Sounds alright, doesn't it? Alas, from here on in, the game falls down rather badly. For a start, everything is far too big. The player's robot almost fills the screen, but doesn't have the detail or animation finesse to support its size. Also, the scale presents a problem in that since only one horizontal level of the city is ever visible on the screen, the game feels more like a duck shoot than an exciting adventure. Absolutely no aiming is necessary for shooting for the monsters either, as they just sit up and swallow the player's fire. Oh dear.

☆

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Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sports Simulation**
Publisher **Audiogenic**

Another Rugby game!? With 'Swing Low Sweet Chariot' still ringing in our ears, it's no surprise that both Audiogenic and Domark have decided this as a suitable time to release their rugby games. However, whereas the Doms have gone for out and out playability with few bells and whistles for their game, 'Genic have opted for a more rigorous approach to the sport, offering plenty of accuracy and a great deal of scope for subtle play. And as such, it's somewhat more satisfying to play, if a bit harder to get into.

It's also a lot prettier, with play viewed from a 3D angle (à la *John Madden's Football* on the Megadrive) and all the players animate nicely if a little stiffly. If this doesn't appeal, there's a selection of other views on offer, including a no-nonsense top-down view for the more traditionally minded. There's also a comprehensive Video Replay function, whereby favourite bits of the game can be saved to disc and watched again and again.

World Class Rugby may not have Domark *Rugby*'s pick-up-and-play instant appeal, but it's a good bet that of the two this will be the one you'll still be loading up in a year's time.

☆☆☆☆

SPECIAL ENTRY!

RICK DANGEROUS

Price **Amiga £7.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Kixx**

Phew! Just squeaking into the reviews directory at the very last second comes everyone's favourite hero, Rick Dangerous. Here, in his first outing (which originally came out on the Micro Style label) Rick must explore a mysterious land very much in the Indiana Jones vein, dodging deadly traps and doing away with evil little pygmys.

Although many games have tried, few have surpasses the fun and excitement which Rick delivers. The graphic style is pretty unique, t oo, with all the characters being short and squat and full of humour.

And quite aside from all that, the escalation of the puzzles and the learning curve which effectively drags the player through the game, instructing and then challenging, make Rick Dangerous fantastically satisfying to play.

☆☆☆☆☆

oh mr newsagent

Blimey! There you are, casually flicking through your latest issue of ACE magazine when a horrible and genuinely frightening thought occurs to you. Not only are you nearing the end of an especially thrill-powered edition of the greatest sci-fi comic in the galaxy, or something, but you can't for the life of you remember when the next issue is going to come out.

You might be going out to a discotheque on the night before publication date, and may be too hung-over (although we all know excess intake of alcoholic beverages is neither big or hard) to fight your way through the crowds which will be undoubtedly vying for the last copy in your local shop.

Or perhaps you've read our Next Month page which will probably have the wrong month on it, and so you won't know *what* is going on.

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ALIEN BREED

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Team 17**

Alien Breed can best be described as the *Aliens* licence that should have been. It grafts Aliens atmosphere onto *Gauntlet*-esque gameplay to create an addictive - albeit unoriginal - winner. One or two players can take part simultaneously, and their job is to run around the six plan-viewed maze-like levels of a monster-infested space station, blasting seven shades of slime out of anything that crawls, slithers or lurks.

Fortunately the problem that always afflicted *Gauntlet* (i.e. though fun, there was no real aim to playing apart from scoring points) has been averted by giving the players a task to complete on each level (normally of the 'find a location and blow it up' nature). Okay, so it's not exactly lifting the game into Arcade Adventure territory, but it's provides enough of a goal to keep the player coming back for more.

The addictive gameplay is backed up by some super-slick scrolling and graphics (although the animation is a little perfunctory), and the term 'arcade-like' is very appropriate here. Throughout the use of sound to create atmosphere and tension is superb, especially when the station's self-destruct sequence is kicked in and the player has to find the exit before the place blows. The only real gripe is that given that the game is for 1Mb Amigas only, you can't help feeling that something slightly more ambitious could have been attempted. But as it stands this is the best straightforward blast for months, and that's a good enough recommendation for anyone.

☆☆☆☆

ARMOURGEDDON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Psygnosis' latest 3D-polygon effort centres around a six-part mission to find the five pieces of a neutron bomb and use it to destroy an enemy HQ. There are six combat vehicles to try out, ranging from ground-hugging tanks and hovercraft to high-flying jets and helicopter and the player must use his 'skill and judgement' to decide when, where and how best to use them to achieve his current mission objectives.

Mouse control of each vehicle is smooth and responsive, with the fluid 3D giving a good pulse-quickening feeling of speed.

The player can switch between the vehicles 'in the field' using the function keys (the computer puts the vehicle on auto when this happens, so there's no risk of a recently-vacated jet ploughing nose-first into the ground). Like Core's *Thunderhawk*, the accent is on action rather than simulation, with the enemy attacking almost as soon as the player pokes a metal-shielded nose out of his bunker, which makes for exciting is somewhat relentless action. But it's not all shoot, shoot, shoot. There's an important management element as well, where the player has to wisely allocate scientists and technicians to develop new weapons and fresh vehicles to replace those blown to pieces by the very active enemy.

Armourgeddon is one of Psygnosis' best games to date, with solid gameplay backing up the impressive visuals. Armourgeddon sick of it? Not one bit.

☆☆☆☆

ATOMINO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Psygnosis**

Hmmm, fashinating! There are few games based around atomic physics, and even fewer interesting ones, so a big "Huzzah!" and pat on the back for Psygnosis. Atomino is a puzzle game based around atomic valency, i.e. the number of bonds an atom can make with other atoms. Hydrogen, for example, can make one bone while Helium can make two.

The aim of the game is to place randomly-allocated atoms down on a grid and try to form molecules of various sizes. (i.e. at least three atoms big). A molecule is only complete when all the atoms within it have their bonds accounted for.

It all sounds a bit...well...dry, but in fact turns out to be great fun with its addictive challenge, pretty graphics and rising tempo sound making it one of the better puzzle games on the market.

☆☆☆☆

BABY JO

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **Loriciels**

Imagine Mirrorsoft's *Brat* in two dimensions and you've got a good idea of what the latest import from French firm Loriciels is all about. Or if you don't know *Brat*, try imagining *Mario* with a nappy-wearing babby as the main character. It's all really rather ludicrous, with the teeny toddler having to eat the bonus goodies as he bounces along the landscape in order to keep fit - but he mustn't eat too much, or he'll mess his nappy! I mean come on! What are these French games designers on? Something pretty strong if the quality of Baby Jo's aesthetics are anything to go by. Poorly designed sprites, atrocious music and hideously jerky backdrops are all proof of Baby Jo's naffness, but it has to be said that it is kind of cute in a rather perverse and definitely strange sort of way.

But if there's one thing it certainly isn't, it's fun - the slow, annoying gameplay and hastily thrown-together design makes sure of that. It's for precisely this reason that Baby Jo should only really be on the shopping list of platform freaks desperate for a new fix - and even then there are much more playable options available.

☆☆

BURGER TIME DELUXE

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Data East**

Now this is a real blast from the past, when arcade games didn't have to throw punters around like some sub-standard funfair ride just to get them to part with their cash. The player here has to guide tiny Pete the Chef around a network of platforms and ladders. In a bizarre culinary exercise Pete has to make giant hamburgers by walking over the various ingredients lying on the platforms, forcing them to fall down the screen onto the the platform below

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and eventually onto a plate at the bottom. Once all the hamburgers have been made Pete advances onto the next, more complex arrangement of platforms.

Now this all sounds a bit easy, but you've reckoned without the mutant sausages, gherkins and fried eggs that have escaped from the cupboard and are wandering the platforms intent on Pete's demise. Fortunately the canny chef is armed with a pepper pot and a carefully-aimed shake will stun the baddies for a few moments allowing Pete to make good his escape. More finally, Pete can try to time his food-dropping antics to crush the ingenious ingredients. Burger Time Deluxe is a fun little game, although the graphics verge on the minuscule. It's probably a bit too simplistic for today's younger gamers, but nostalgia buffs will enjoy this tasty slice of the past.

☆☆☆

CAPTAIN PLANET

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Action**
Publisher **Mindscape**

Pass the lentils, man. Thanks. Yeah, like I was telling you there's like this guy, right, and he's like this sort of super-hero, you know. Goes around saving the world from these real heavy breadhead polluters. Yeah, like you say. Heavy shit, man. Anyway, he's got these five helpers, and they're like just kids, you know, but they've got this special rings that give them these cosmic powers. Totally amazing. Each level of the game like centres around one of these six characters, and they're just far out.

I mean like the first character, Ma-Ti, uses her ring to like chill out the bad guys and regrow plants so she can climb up to the level exit. Yeah, and like when she gets out there's this helicopter she has to fly around in and scoop up endangered elephants and take them to a sanctuary. Yeah, exactly. It's like this amazing mix of platform game and shoot-'em-up. Mmmm, yeah, the graphics are sort of cute, the scrolling's fine, and the tunes are neato, but control over your little sprite guy's a bit tricky. Yeah, Tricky Dicky. Watergate. All The President's Men. But you get used to it and all in all it's quite a far-out experience, if not the slickest thing like you've ever seen. Lots of really pretty psychedelic colours, too.

☆☆☆☆

CASTELIAN

Price **GameBoy £29.99 (Import)**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Triffix Entertainment**

Remember *Nebulus*? It was a classy platform game starring a tiny blob called Pogo. Each of its tortuously-difficult levels was set on on a tall tower. The player could move Pogo left and right, and make him jump over game or shoot at the weirdo aliens. However, in a unique twist, the towers used to rotate to follow Pogo's movement. Quite a graphical achievement on the Speccy!

Now *Nebulus* has come to the GameBoy under the title Castelian. And while the name may have changed the game certainly hasn't. It still looks stunning and plays well but has a difficulty rating through the roof. However, completing a tower is extremely satisfying, so if you fancy a real challenge then you know where to come.

☆☆☆☆

CELTIC LEGENDS

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Ubi Soft**

It's amazing how you can tell, 99% of the time, what an RPG game is going to be vaguely like just by knowing what part of the world it's coming from. For example, anything that comes from California is likely to be all complex and involved, while anything from, say France or Germany, while still having all the traditional FRP elements, always tends to present things in a much more simplistic and arcadey manner. As is the case here, with this little Gallic number which is very much in the same vein as Thalion's *Dragonflight* and countless other Euro RPGs.

It's actually a fine little game, based around all the old RPG cliches, but handling them with traditional French style and aplomb. It's all set in the mythical world of Celtica, where the misuse of magic by an evil sorcerer has wrenched the kingdom in twain.

What follows is a mix of strategy and conventional RPG elements presented from a number of viewpoints - on the battlefield, high above the world itself and so on, depending upon the scene.

Though in gameplay terms it offers nothing that seasoned fans of the genre will find particularly earth-shattering, it's different enough in terms of presentation and style to make it well worth investigating - especially for novice gamers who may be looking for an accessible and appealing introduction to the genre.

☆☆☆☆

CENTURION - DEFENDER OF ROME

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Cast as an aspiring Centurion, it's the player's duty to both defend the homeland and expand the Roman Empire as far afield as possible. This megalomaniacal aim is somewhat foiled at first by the fact that the player starts with just a single legion of soldiers and a city of citizens to keep under control.

The game is a well-judged blend of icon-driven strategy and arcade-style interludes. For example, to keep the subdued provinces happy, the player can take part in chariot races and keep taxes light. As the game progresses the armies under your command grow and ships placed at your disposal to take armies to neighbouring shores become bigger and better. If the player's lucky he can even have a crack at seducing the voluptuous Cleopatra. Poor old Megadrive owners in particular are starved of this type of game, so if you're looking for something to exercise your brain a little, you could do far worse than this.

☆☆☆☆

CHOPLIFTER 2

Price **Gameboy £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Nintendo**

Choplifter first appeared in 1983 via Broderbund and is still fondly remembered today. The player's mission as super-crack helicopter pilot is to rescue survivors from a horizontally scrolling warzone. To do this the player must land near the waving refugees and wait for them to board. This can be quite harrowing at times as you're a proverbial sitting duck for all the enemy gun installations and machine-gunning planes which constantly lay siege.

The player's copter is equipped with a rapid-firing cannon and a limited number of bombs with which to protect himself. And that's really all there is to it - however, like *Defender*, *Choplifter* is one of those games that, once played, is never forgotten. Fast action, challenging game task and a password system help make this one of the best games out on the Gameboy, and a must for any action fans collection.

☆☆☆☆☆

CIVILIZATION

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

American games design guru Sid Meier, fresh from his success with the brilliant *Railroad Tycoon*, has surpassed himself with this latest effort, which can truly be said to boggle the mind in terms of depth, scale and scope. Adopting the same functional top-down presentation format of *Tycoon*, the game charges the player with the task of building a civilisation, from a bunch of primitive settlers in an unexplored, uncharted world, to a global empire capable of space travel, nuclear power and the other trappings 20th Century life.

The range of factors and elements that play a part in the game is quite simply awesome, as the player's people advances and expands, founding cities, setting sail across the water, making technological discoveries and building armed forces - all while computer-controlled 'rival' empires do the same. Along the way the player must set taxes, maintain civil order, negotiate with other nations, care for the environment and take part in various arms and space races.

Civilization is undoubtedly the most involved strategy game ever conceived, and as such many less commited or novice gamers are likely to be swamped by the game's maze-like intricacies. For those willing to invest the time and effort, however, Civilization pays off like no other. Wonderful.

☆☆☆☆☆

CRIME TIME

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Starbyte**

Crime Time is an attempt to break into 'adventure-without-typing' market cornered by Lucasfilm and Sierra on the IBM PC. Unfortunately, it's not a fraction as good as their wares. The game opens with a moderately-interesting intro which takes along time to tell you that somewhere in the City a crime has been committed (tell us something we don't already know). Well, I say moderately interesting, and it is... the first time around. Unfortunately it can't be skipped and has to be watched everytime the game is loaded. Annoying.

And this over-indulgence on the part of the programmers and lack of thought for the player extends to the game itself. It's a graphic adventure - there's a picture window at the top of the screen and a list of actions and nearby items at the bottom. The idea is the player selects an action with the mouse (i.e. 'Take') and then an item from the list (i.e. 'Key'). While hardly ground-breaking in its innovation, it at least has the virtue of being a system that works reasonably well.

Movement around the game world is by clicking on the points of a compass that also sits at the bottom of the screen. As the player moves from the location to location a new graphic slowly fades in pixel by pixel... painfully slowly. Bad.

The scenery graphics are fine, but drawn at a series of badly-skewed angles for no other reason than to be different, with the end result that they are just painful to look at. On top of that the adventure itself isn't all that interesting either. Strictly one for die-hard adventure fans only - and then only those with money to burn or one letter short of a keyboard.

☆☆

CRUISE FOR A CORPSE

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Delphine/US Gold**

The plot for Cruise for a Corpse is firmly rooted in the Agatha Christie 'isolated location, plenty of suspects' crime story tradition, detailing how the player is invited to a Greek tycoon's yacht for a well-earned holiday only to get there and find his host bumped off by an unknown murderer. Before you can say 'Inspector Wexford' the player is forced to don poncy moustache and tufty sideburns to solve the heinous crime.

After a lot of pre-release interest from the press, there were high hopes for Cruise for a Corpse. Is it the excellent game everyone seemed to think it's be? Well, yes... and no. In the graphics and sound department it's exemplary, with large, fluidly-animated sprites moving over exquisitely detailed backgrounds and plenty of suitable tunes and samples playing away in the background. All conspire to generate an excellent sense of mood and atmosphere.

The player directs his on-screen character ('Raoul') via the mouse. By clicking the mouse pointer on objects of interest, a menu appears listing the various things the player can do with the selected item (i.e. 'Open' or 'Examine' hat box). Movement around the yacht is effected by walking Raoul from location to location by clicking on exits to the current location, such as doors or hallways, or more quickly by calling up the yacht map and 'sending' Raoul immediately from place to place. As a user interface it's difficult to think of another as intuitive and easy to use.

The major problem with Cruise for a Corpse is its pace. The animation, though wondrous, is slow. Examining the contents of a room can become quite painful, as Raoul slowly turns, walks, turns, bends down, examines the item only for a message to appear stating that "There is nothing of interest here". Equally annoying is the frequent though inevitable accessing and swapping of five (count 'em) game disks. All too often the player's enthusiasm for clue hunting can be severely dampened by the reduction of the game's speed to near snail's pace. Less important, some of the generally excellent French-English translation is a bit dubious in places, such as the Cabin Boy who is described as "dynamic".

Those comments apart, anyone with the patience to sit through the occasional doldrums will find Cruise for a Corpse a superb buy, heaped with quality presentation and atmosphere and presenting a big enough game task to satisfy even the greatest sleuth.

☆☆☆☆

DEATHBRINGER

Price **Atari ST £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Empire**

There's this sword, right. These evil wizards have magically given it the

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ability to absorb the souls of anyone it slays. Their intention is to use it to get rid off their goody-goody though thicky-thicky nemesis Karn, a barbarian so stupid he can't even spell his own name right. However, luck isn't on the wizards' side, and the sword finds its way into Karn's calloused hands. Hardly believing his luck, Karn sets out to give the sword back to the wizards - in style. Basically it's all a thinly-veiled excuse for a sideways scrolling bloodfest of hacking and slaying, with Karn plowing through wave after wave of bizarro monsters.

Deathbringer boasts some of the most impressive parallax-scrolling backgrounds yet seen, even if they are somewhat lacking in colour. The sprites are well-drawn with a nice line in humour, but they're rather garish in a monochromatic sort of way. But despite its good graphics and adequate sound, Deathbringer's real problem is that it's basically a bit dull. The combat moves are limited in range and slow to implement and just wandering along, endlessly plugging away at the baddies, is not all that interesting. And the prettiest backdrops in the whole World can't make up for that. *Barbarian III* this ain't.

☆☆☆

DEUTEROS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

This sequel to *Millennium 2.2* by the same authors is set a thousand years after the prequel's events. Mankind has fallen into a sort of post-technological malaise and forgotten its former space-travelling glory. It's the player's task to rekindle man's passion for the stars and turn the race into the masters of the Galaxy once again. The gameplay boils down to endless resource and manpower allocation between various departments, dealing with the occasional crises that crop up and so on. Although programmed well and moderately enthralling, there really isn't anything on show that hasn't been done more entertainingly elsewhere. Strictly one for the strategy diehard.

☆☆☆

E.A. HOCKEY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Sports Arcade**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Like *Kick Off* with fighting in, Electronic Arts' Hockey will appeal to everyone. A section of teams from around the globe, each wit their own abilities and weaknesses battle it out in the Ice hockey World League.

Following on from their success with *John Madden's Football*, EA pull yet another winner our of the bag with this, perhaps their most frenetic title to date.

Having selected the length of game, whether the player wishes to compete in a one-off match or a knock-out, selected his team and that of the enemy, it's game on! Skating around the rink is simple enough, and control over the puck is surprisingly instinctive. Since the rink is so small and the players can move so swiftly and violently against each other, Ice Hockey is an extremely rapid, high scoring game. Basically, whoever gets the puck from the face-off is most likely to score. Until, of course, the player gets the hang of the wide variety of tackling moves available to him, from a good honest going-for-the-puck scenario to a full body check.

Rile an opposition player on a too-regular basis, though, and you'd better be ready to put your fist where his mouth is, as one of the features included is brawling. While the rest of your team are trying to do some good, it's possible to clang away at that guy who skated over your shoes for as long as you like! A graphic and gameplay marvel, E.A. Hockey is wholeheartedly recommended to one and all. Hooray!

☆☆☆☆☆

ELF

Price **Amiga £25.95**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Ocean**

As Cornelius the Elf, it's the player's task to rescue his sweetheart Elisa from the pointy-nailed clutches of Necrilous the Not Very Nice. The game takes place over six Tolkien-esque levels filled with platforms, pitfalls, ladders and bridges. Cornelius' magic powder allows him to protect himself from Necrilous' rampant horde of henchcreatures by firing bolts of magic energy. Numerous interest-sustaining spells and power-ups can be bought from Ye Olde Localle Shoppe using cash picked up along the way.

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sents its own unique set of problems to solve and tasks to achieve, requiring that the player constantly evolve new strategies to deal with them. All in all Elf is a polished high-quality romp, perfect for platform or arcade adventure fans.

☆☆☆☆

F-15 STRIKE EAGLE II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £29.99**
Genre **Simulations**
Publisher **MicroProse**

MicroProse make a departure from their usual rigorously-accurate sims with this action-orientated affair. It's the flight sim equivalent of the Janet and John books, i.e. nice n' simple with no complications. Players have six combat arenas to choose between, each with various missions to select. These missions are nearly all simple 'get in, destroy a couple of targets and get out alive' jobs, with the player have to simultaneously defend against swarms of enemy jets. Control is via keyboard, joystick or mouse and is highly responsive in each case.

The screen update is fast enough but there are quicker 3D routines about - it's more than adequate for the job in hand, however. Sound is disappointing, with a white-noise hiss being being the player's only audio companion for most of the journey. In the gameplay department this is a winner, with plenty of white-knuckle action to get the adrenalin pumping. Veterans may bemoan the game's lack of depth, but anyone else should find this just their cup of tea, with a yummy Jammy Dodger in the saucer to boot.

☆☆☆☆

FACE OFF

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Sport Game**
Publisher **Krisalis**

There aren't that many Ice Hockey games available on the Amiga. In fact, there aren't any. So Face Off is something of a welcome addition to the canon of sports games. Worth getting? Well, yes and no. Like *Manchester United Europe*, it's a very polished game, with some super slick menu and option screens. There's a league to participate in, where the player can do anything from train the players to rename the manager. And like *MUE*, the player can turn off the arcade game and concentrate on the managerial side of things if they're that way inclined, or alternatively just play the arcade game alone.

The arcade side of things is okay, although some may wish the action had just a touch more zip. Certainly compared to *E.A. Hockey* it's distinctly sluggish. Control is simple and easy to pick up - shoot, pass or thump via the joystick - and the sport is fun, especially when things get a little physical and the fists start flying. As standard on most sports games these days there's a replay function so that that blistering goal can be replayed again and again. Overall, Face Off is a rounded package, though unlikely to exactly grab the public's imagination. Fans of the sport will enjoy it, but just how many of them are there in the UK?

☆☆☆☆

FATAL REWIND

Price **MegaDrive £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Psygnosis/Electronic Arts**

Psygnosis disappoints nobody with its first foray onto the 16-bit consoles, maintaining the same high quality of graphics and sound that's made it the legend it is in the Amiga market. And thankfully in this case there's the gameplay to back up the visuals. But if *The Killing Game Show* had to be renamed for its transition from the Amiga to the MegaDrive, couldn't they have come up with something a little better than Fatal Rewind? Apart from the fact that it doesn't actually mean much, it's a fairly obvious attempt to sound like *Total Recall*, a film which bears no resemblance to this game at all.

The player is put in charge of a mechanical walker reminiscent of the ED-209s in *Robocop*. An agile little thing, it can run left and right, jump, fire and even climb up the sides of walls. Things they can do nowadays, huh? The player has to negotiate a network of platforms in the hunt for the exit to the next level. Aliens fly on from all sides, swirling and swarming about the screen with the sole intent of seeing the player bite the dust. And just to give the player a touch more incentive to escape the platforms are slowly sinking into a deadly red sea. The need to find keys to certain areas adds a small amount of depth to the game, but these arcade adventure elements

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never swamp what is basically a very classy and addictive shoot-'em-up.
☆☆☆☆

FINAL FIGHT

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **US Gold**

Yet another in US Gold's seemingly endless string of CapCom conversions. In Metro City (loosely based on Noo Yoik) all is not well. Crime is rife and to make a bad situation worse the Mayor's right-dreamy daughter has been kidnapped by - you guessed it - Mr Big. (This old Mr Big certainly gets around, doesn't he?) The player and optional partner have to fist-fight their ways through the city's wastelands to rescue her. Why? Why not?

Final Fight is something of a first for beat-'em-ups on the home computer, i.e. it's actually quite good. The sprites are large and decently animated, the background scroll is smooth and the action is fast. Someone of the detecting whether a punch connects or not is a little dodgy, but apart from that this can be recommended unreservedly to anyone who fancies a little aggro without bruising their knuckles.
☆☆☆☆

FLICKY

Price **Megadrive £34.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Sega**

"Don't be put off by the screenshots on the back of the box" is probably the best bit of advice I can give about Flicky. It looks awful - tiny primary-colour sprites and garish backdrops. And to be honest, things don't improve much in the game itself. However, like Quasimodo, an ugly appearance conceals the goodness inside.

The player controls the tiny bird of the title. The lickle darling's chicks have gone and got themselves lost in the rooms of a giant cat-infested house. Flicky has to run and jump about, collect her scattered brood and take them to the safety of the Exit, while avoiding the prowling felines. Flicky is a wonderfully playable game, very simple but packed with fun. Some may dispute whether there's £35-worth of fun, but for those with the cash it's a good purchase.

☆☆☆☆

FLOOR 13

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

The myth that strategy games are boring has been well and truly exploded by a game that's likely to convert even confirmed trigger-addicts to a more staple and intelligent software diet. Floor 13 offers a new slant on the strategy genre by basing itself around a compelling scenario and offering gameplay that goes beyond the regular strategy framework.

Set in present-day Britain, it tells of a government-run secret police force that must avert scandals, wipe out subversive elements and generally protect the government from embarrassing incidents so that it doesn't fall from grace. As Director General of this corrupt agency, the player is solely responsible for its operations.

The game is played almost entirely from a single static screen of an office desk, onto which intelligence reports and newspaper stories arrive from the outside world and form the basis of the information which the player works from as plots and storylines unfold. Various sub-departments, such as surveillance, interrogation and disinformation are the instruments of the player's will, with shady agents tailing suspects, tapping phones, searching premises and even torturing and killing people to achieve the government's immoral aims.

The way in which the game reveals information as half-clues and red herrings mean that good detective work and thorough cross-checking of intelligence data is as important as the conventional strategic skills which are also required. It's all thoroughly absorbing, very realistic stuff, and comes highly recommended, even to those who can't normally stand strategy games.
☆☆☆☆☆

FOOTBALL DIRECTOR II

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **D&H Games**

Yaaaaaawn. Don't get me wrong, I've got nothing against football - there's just something implicitly boring about management games of this type. Player Manager is the exception to the rule, firstly because it's so excellent and secondly because you got to play *Kick Off* with it, which made it doubly excellent. When faced with something like this, though, it's difficult to imagine anybody but the most desperate sort of gamer or die-hard footy fan actually getting any enjoyment out of it.

Technically of course, there's nothing to fault it, and the depth that the game goes into is commendable - you've got your league and cup trophies, financial problems, player injuries, team tactics, talent scouts, stadium management and all the rest of it. On the aesthetic side, however, nothing much seems to have changed since the days when these games were prevalent on the Spectrum about three or four years ago.

These days, however, the cheapo graphics and sound just don't cut it any more, do when something like this comes along it seems like a bit of an embarrassment, really. But of course it's the gameplay that counts and for what it is, Football Director is entertaining enough, and providing you're not expecting too much and willing to give the game some time, it should pay off handsomely. The wiser members of the computerised football-management fraternity will probably want to save their pennies for *Player Manager 2*, however.
☆☆☆

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Racing Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Believe you me, you've never seen a racing game like this. *Lotus 2? OutRun Europa? Indianapolis 500?* Pah! They are but children's toys compared to the complete and utter excellence of Formula One Grand Prix, the latest and greatest game from the programming genius that is Geoff '*Stunt Car Racer*' Crammond. The graphics are truly amazing, with highly-detailed cars (complete with driver's helmet poking out of the cockpit) literally zooming around tracks lined with stands, trees, fences and cranes. The sound matches the visuals, with good use made of throaty samples for the engine.

But it's not just the quality of the graphics or the sounds that makes F1GP so special, it's the meticulous attention to detail that generates an authentic and involving Grand Prix atmosphere. Everything you'd expect to find on a Grand Prix circuit - stands, bridges, tunnels, etc - is there (and in the identical position they'd be found in real life), even extending right down to stewards pushing crippled cars off the track and engineer crews waiting in the pits.

The wonderful control over the car is the essential icing on the cake, with plenty of difficulty modifiers to make the game easy enough for Granny Smith to play or tough enough to bring Sterling Moss out in beads of sweat. Indeed, so good is F1GP that it earned itself an ACE Trailblazer and the honour of becoming the new Racing Simulation Benchmark. Good enough for you?
☆☆☆☆☆

GUNSHIP 2000

Price **IBM PC £39.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **MicroProse**

Nobody writes simulations like Microprose does. This is a highly-realistic sequel to the company's earlier mega-hit *Gunship*, which has gone done in software history as one of the best-selling sims ever. This sequel is far more than just *Gunship+*. Every part of the game has been given a radical overhaul.

Probably the most impressive aspect is the revamped graphics system. Using a sort of patchwork-quilt landscaping technique, the gameworld has been modelled in exacting detail, complete with rise, hills, mountains, valleys, cuttings. If it's a geographical feature, it's there. As usual, the game takes the form of a series of pilot-testing missions. Unfortunately this complexity means that you really need at least a 16MHz PC to get anything approaching speed from the game. Sound with a board is marvelously atmospheric, and adds no end to the gritty battlefield feel.

The 'copter control is good, but actually getting the craft to fly matches that of the real thing, i.e. it's very difficult, and certainly makes Gunship 2000 not the sort of game to cut your sim-playing teeth on. However, if you're looking for the ultimate chopper simulation, then here it is.
☆☆☆☆☆

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ACE 01/92

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

Hard Nova's a game that's difficult to categorise. Like *Starflight 2* it's a mixture of styles, boasting strategy as well as role-playing elements, adventure as well arcade space-flight sequences. It's the sort of stuff that Electronic Arts in America have been churning out for years - science fiction odysseys with alien worlds, sleazy mutant characters, big spaceships clanging together and all the rest of it. There's supposedly a comic edge to this one, with the player taking on the persona of wisecracking space bitch Hard Nova.

You can interact with characters, RPG-fashion, collect objects, do missions and trek across the galaxy, kidnapping, ferrying cargo from planet to planet and so on and so forth.

It sounds like a bit of a cop out, but if this sort of malarkey is your cup of tea, then you're liable to have a lot of long-lasting fun with it - it's just a shame that the vast majority of gamers don't have the patience to get into it. Well worth checking out - the game's got plenty of atmosphere (ho ho!), and gets progressively more involving the longer it's played. Just don't expect to pick it up straight away.

☆☆☆

HEIMDALL

Price **Amiga (1Mb) £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Core Design**

After a long string of shoot'em-ups and platform games (*Car-Vup*, *Frenetic*, *Chuck Rock*), Core Design has returned to more involving territory with Heimdall, an isometric arcade adventure cum role playing game based around Viking lore.

The Heimdall of the title is a human gift from the Gods, sent to Earth by Odin to recover the three great weapons that will vanquish the forces of evil. After selecting a crew from the varied characters available, Hemidall sets sail across the Nordic waters to destinations unknown.

For the most part, the game is yer basic isometric adventure à la *The Immortal*, although there are some interesting strategic and FRP elements - all the characters have differing skills, which means that the player must switch between them, as in a conventional RPG, to perform certain tasks. The strategy is provided by the seafaring section, where the player must travel between the various islands (there are three archipelagos, each hiding one of the ehtereal weapons and each forming an independent level) in the most efficient manner.

Heimdall is a fun adventure game, although the action, due to the product's FRP overtones, is a little slower and less exciting than most of its counterparts in the genre. In fact, there are times when very little seems to be happening at all, and only those who are willing to buckle down, make maps and all the rest of it, are likely to enjoy the game to the full.

That said, it's been designed with the utmost care and cleverness, and there's enough here to kep anybody glued to the screen for some considerable time. A fine game.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUDSON HAWK

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Ocean**

Bruce Willis' film was a disaster, and Ocean hadn't turned out anything of note in the film conversion stakes for quite a while, so nobody was really expecting very much out of Hudson Hawk. But instead of the usual cynical and barely-playable licence, what we got was the best platform game so far this year. Special FX took a big gamble in its interpretation of the film by chucking 99% of the source material out of the window, and getting on with the business of just building a good game around the film's basic premise - that of a cat burglar stealing valuable artifacts from around the world.

It works superbly, in much the same style as former platform classics like *Mario*, *Rick Dangerous* and *Switchblade*, with small, comical characters playing over tortuously-designed platform levels. It's a class act, without a doubt, with fiendish traps and pitfalls lurking around every corner. The gameplay is easily up to console/arcade

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standard, and the graphics and sound really do enhance the fun factor because they're so jolly. Don't be put off by the shoddy licence connotations - Hudson Hawk is a brilliant game in its own right and deserves a place in your collection. Today.

☆☆☆☆☆

HUNTER

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Action Strategy**
Publisher **Activision**

It's a sad old world, this one we live in. Just when poor old Activision get some decent product together, their Mediagenic daddy goes and pulls the plug on them. Now, however, after the aforementioned 'decent product' has been swilling around doing very little indeed for the last few months, Activision's current putter-outer of games, The Disc Company have taken it upon themselves to let another trickle of gameyness reach the streets.

Hunter is the sort of game that you dream of playing. A polygon based action strategy game will all of the usually associated nonsense removed, it offers all the "wouldn't it be great if..." features which should, by rights, be included in all these games.

Taking the role of the Hunter, the player must travel around a bunch of islands, systematically destroying all enemy installations in whatever way he sees fit. Your particular mission is detailed in a briefing where specific, immediate targets are detailed by your allied commander.

The best thing about Hunter is that there's no messing about. If you want to infiltrate an enemy base, get a disguise and you're away! If you want to get about, steal a helicopter/jeep/truck or sailboard. It's all so easy and because the unnecessary complexity of basic tasks has been removed, the player can concentrate on progressing with the mission much more intently.

Excellent graphics and a fast-paced storyline can only add to Hunter's already awe-inspiring style. A winner.

☆☆☆☆☆

THE IMMORTAL

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Arts**

It's over a year now since The Immortal appeared to great public acclaim on the Amiga. A masterpiece of animation and game design, it was probably responsible for selling a fair few 1Mb upgrades. At last it's made it's way on to the PC, and now features a couple of new enhancements that make it any even better game.

The majority of the game is identical. The player guides a superbly-animated wizard on his travels around an isometric-3D dungeon. As he progresses around the corridors, he discovers treasure, traps and - of course - terrifying monsters. In the original Amiga game, the fairly complex combat took place at the same scale as the rest of the game (i.e. small) and it made judging responses to the opponents lunges and feints a touch difficult. On the PC, however, when combat occurs the view switches to a close-up that makes things far easier.

The only gripe from a PC owners point of view is that having been spoiled by the recent plethora of 256-colour games, the 16 on display here are a little disappointing. However, this doesn't seriously detract from what is an otherwise excellent game, and recommended without hesitation to anyone who fancies a bit of dungeon n' dragoning.

☆☆☆☆☆

JIMMY WHITE'S 'WHIRLWIND' SNOOKER

*Price.***Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Sport Simulation**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Archer Maclean, veteran programmer of *IK+* and *Dropzone* is probably the last person you'd expect to write a snooker sim. Cue games have been around since the beginning of computer gaming - a few coloured shapes, some angle-of-deflection algorithms and away you go. But even with the advent of 3D graphics, none of them have really had any element of realism, until now.

The table is viewed from behind the cue ball so the player can line up shots as if on a real table. The view can be rotated through various axes and zoomed in on so the player can see from virtually every angle conceivable. The ball movement is accurate, without balls stopping for no apparent reason or going off at peculiar angles.

Two player games are the best, but

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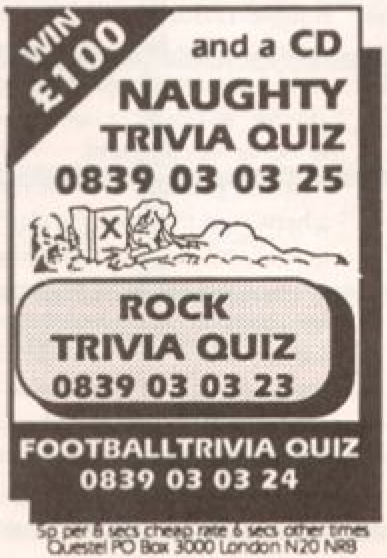

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four levels of computer opponent are available for the lone gamer. As the player progresses more sophisticated tactics can be incorporated, like positional play. Swerve, stun, screw and every type of spin are all possible, and are vital for snookering opponents. The end result of JWWS's comprehensive and realistic approach to recreating snooker is the most authentic sports simulation to date.

☆☆☆☆☆

LOTUS TURBO CHALLENGE 2

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Gremlin Graphics**

A worthy successor to the excellent *Lotus Esprit Turbo Challenge*, this game has a number of interesting differences to its predecessor. For a start, it's a better one-player game, but not so good for two players. Technically superior to the original, there's nevertheless something just a little bit lacking. Perhaps it's the removal of the laps system, or perhaps it's the fact that crashing into the other cars really doesn't do you that much damage. But whatever, it ain't quite as good.

However, it IS a great deal better than 80% of the driving games on the market, and there's a Link-up option allowing up to four players to race at once. The action is fast and furious and the control the players have over their cars has been greatly improved.

Players must blast their way through a selection of stages, each boasting a particular hazard, whether it be natural (snow, rain, sand) or man-made (enormous juggernauts rumbling across the road). Graphically superior to the vast majority of similar titles, Lotus just looks the business, with flashy trackside obstacles and a high level of detail on the cars themselves.

Despite being hampered by some aggravating deceleration whenever the player drives through any water and the flawed two player mode, Lotus 2 is a pretty impressive game.

☆☆☆☆

LAST NINJA 3

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **System 3**

Well, well, well. After everyone has been shining up their shoes at the prospect of giving System 3's much touted, much lorded and much delayed conclusion of the Ninja series a right old kicking, the bleeding thing turns out to be great!

Applying a more arcade-adventure angle to the tried and tested Ninja formula, the boys at the System have produced a game which has all the visual appeal of the first two games in the series and none of the problems. Well, that's not quite the case, but instead of the game relying so heavily on the fight routines which, to be honest, were never that good, the emphasis has been moved onto the puzzle-solving element which isn't half as hard to implement.

Spanning an epic quest across a bunch of different zones (earth, air, fire, water and void) the game continually throws up different puzzles which the player must solve in order to reach the next stage.

Aside from completing these puzzles, there's a fair amount of rucking to be done too, and the collectible weapons add enough novelty to ensure that even when the player is doing over his twelfth adversary of the level, he'll find something new to do.

Graphically, the game is really rather special, with the isometric landscapes at a stage which must surely be approaching the state of the art, and the animations of the characters themselves being undeniably fine. Just look at the speed blur on that.

☆☆☆☆

LEISURESUIT LARRY 5

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Sierra On-Line**

He's Larry Laffer! She's Passionate Patti! And they're in a whole lot of trouble! Leisure Suit Larry 5, the latest instalment in the impossibly successful adventure series chronicles the spying adventures of America's favourite lounge lizard.

In what promises to be the most sexy adventure in the series, the player must guide Larry and Patti through a world of porn and mobsters in the quest to keep good honest smut on the airwaves. Initially taking the role of the audition host of America's Sexiest Home Videos, Larry quickly becomes embroiled in a hairbrained underworld plot to get all porn off the normal market and drive it underground where enormous profits can be made.

It's all pretty standard point and click stuff, but this time the player alternates between the very different personas of Larry and Patti, allowing both to get into sexy scrapes and also avoiding and particularly severe cries of "Sexism!" from bendy liberal wets.

Again, the hand-painted 256-colour graphics and game design are an excellent splint for what occasionally lapses into a bout of pretty lame gags. However, this time Larry does have moments of absolute brilliance, and the continual promise of a further saucy pic of a top spy in a saucy pose is enough to keep you coming back for more. No? Well, please yourselves.

☆☆☆☆

MAGIC GARDEN

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Adventure**
Publisher **Electronic Zoo**

Good God! Whatever next. Having been plagued for months by an apparently never-ending stream of ceramic gnomes, we were understandably keen to get our hands on the game which they promote. And what a peculiar concoction it is.

In his endeavours to become 'the most efficient gnome', the player must guide a gnome around the eponymous magic garden doing, well, this is where it becomes a little bit unclear actually. He can do pretty much whatever he fancies. He can water the flowers. He can mow the lawn. He can use some magic seeds and fly around on the back of a big dragonfly! But the gnome must be careful, for there are terrible traps which live in the garden like big flowers which can hurt him or tall grass which can slow him down.

And Gnomey had better be careful with the number of objects he's carrying, or he will become too tired and get hit by lightning and die. But the gnome won't get hit by lightning if he is exploring the underground caverns where the toilet is! Gnomey can flush the toilet for extra efficiency.

Presented in side-on elevation, the game looks, plays, smells tastes and is just odd. It's as odd as anything I've ever seen in my life. Peculiar Beatrix Potter style graphics and gameplay which quite honestly is tricky to imagine appealing to the masses make Magic Garden a true enigma.

☆☆

MARTIAN MEMORANDUM

Price **IBM PC £35.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Access/US Gold**

Once again a game pretends to be an 'interactive movie' and turns out to be little more than a simplistic adventure with flashy graphics and sound. But in Martian Memorandum's case the aesthetics are enough to make up for the game design's shortcomings - or at least they seem to be for the first few hours. The game uses digitised video footage, sampled speech and film quality music to set the scene (the story casts you as a futuristic private detective who must travel to Mars to track down the kidnapped daughter of a famous industrialist), and it works very well, creating a strong sense of atmosphere and involvement.

But as is so often the case with games of this type, the effect of these flashy gimmicks soon wears off and when you actually buckle down to play the game you realise that there isn't really that much to see or do. An ardent adventurer could easily complete it inside of a week, because the linear game design means that it's almost impossible to go down the wrong track - it's as if you're being guided by an invisible helping hand, and that's not very satisfying. Both *Rise Of The Dragon* and *Heart Of China* offer similar and more satisfying experiences, so if you've got the PC muscle to run so demanding a product, you'd be well advised to check either of those out instead.

☆

MEGAFORTRESS

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Mindscape**

The trouble with games based on taking every single role in a big, stupid old plane like the B-52 is that virtually every role is mind-numbingly boring. I mean, who honestly wants to plot their course across thousands of miles of terrain using a 3D terrain mapping computer or have to fiddle around with ultrasound frequencies in order to jam the enemy's radar?

The aim of the game is to pilot a battle-scarred B-52 across both Iraq and the Soviet 'Union', keeping the location and aim of your mission utterly

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secret until the awesome tonnage of firepower can be unleashed on the target. Unfortunately, for all it's gung-ho packaging and intent, Megafortress is just a very good simulation of a rather dull business. Far more fun can be had in any of a host of more recently released flight games, and Microprose's Stealth Fighter series even offer similar creep-up-on-the-enemy antics for those players who are especially keen on that sort of thing.

Perfectly competent both graphically and on the play front, Megafortress has missions designed by real B-52 navigator and best selling author Dale Brown, although it's one of those games that I guess you really need to have experienced the real thing to appreciate.

☆☆☆

MEGA LO MANIA

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Image Works**

Released amid a bunch of God-sims that are still coming thick and fast, Mirrorsoft's offering has fared better than most, steering sufficiently clear of the Big Daddy *Populous* while not being afraid to borrow little bits here and there where appropriate.

Set in an alternate universe, Mega lo Mania is all about the quest for power. Power over a set of worlds, each made up from a suite of islands, to be precise. New worlds are formed and intelligent life is placed upon them, upon which interstellar freeloaders descend and try to seize the reigns of power for themselves.

The conflict arises, needless to say, when more than one freeloader takes a shine to a particular island. Since each area can only have one ruler, a campaign of imperialism begins, with each player trying to use the forces at his disposal to overthrow the others.

Each island exists within its own time period, and the rate of development, intelligence and so on of its inhabitants is governed accordingly. Players quick to invest time in invention and the refining of natural elements, rather than simply running around hitting the others with sticks are more likely to succeed.

☆☆☆☆☆

MEGATRAVELLER 2: QUEST FOR THE ANCIENTS

Price **IBM PC £TBA**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **Empire**

This latest UK release from American software team Paragon is none too surprisingly a sequel to *MegaTraveller 1: The Zhodani Conspiracy*. As before, the player leads a team of five space adventurers through toil and trouble to (hopefully) riches and fame. This time around, the player task is to find a way to halt the flow of toxic slime emanating from a mysterious set of ruins left by a dead race called the Ancients. But are they dead? That is up to the player to find out...

Sporting high-quality 256-colour VGA, this is certainly a treat on the eye, and the ears as well with a suitable sound card. The game itself is an RPG in the *Ultima* style, but not half as rigorous - which for many will be more than a blessing. The story is fun and involving, with plenty of sub-tasks to perform that provide welcome and often amusing relief from the main plot. If one has a minor niggle it's that the space combat - which you'd think would be the most exciting part of the game - is flat and dull, with little sense of player involvement. In summary, highly recommended.

☆☆☆☆

MEGA TWINS

Price *Atari* **ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

There's big trouble in the land of cutey things. A dark shadow, etc, etc, has fallen across the land, and it's up to the two sweetest and most unthreatening warriors ever to grace computer software to save the day. At its core Mega Twins is a platform game - one or two players guide their cutesy heroes through level after level of ledges and chasms, seeing off the attacking monsters with a lunge from their tiny little swords. Magic orbs can be found along the way that act as super weapons, which are particularly useful against the super-tough end-of-level nasties.

As a conversion of the CapCom coin-op Mega Twins is hardly startling, but it's competent enough. Apart from the slightly turgid pace of the action, the main thing that prevents Mega Twins from making any real impression is the lack of excitement. There are no real thrills on offer - the platform element is minor, and having to endlessly tap fire to jab the beasties into oblivion is hardly opening up whole new vistas of tele-visual entertainment. The final nail in the coffin is the fact that the whole thing is incredibly easy - a competent player will probably get half-way through the game on his first set of credits. Mega Twins had A-grade potential, but whether it's the fault of the original coin-op or the conversion it's actually turned out to be Meagre rather than Mega.

☆☆☆

MiG29M SUPER FULCRUM

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Domark**

Improving on an already successful formula, Domark have done away with many of the longevity problems of their first MiG game and have set this game against an epic backdrop of conflict in southern America. Taking the role of the pilot of a United Nations controlled MiG, the player must launch himself into hostile airspace from a solitary allied-controlled airbase - his mission is to gradually erode the stinking rebel infidels' grasp on the area by blowing up their supply lines and destroying their fuel depots.

It's bizarre that the company most recently associated with not especially excellent coin-op conversions should turn out such a classy simulation, and as a result, it may be tough for them to find the right audience. Nevertheless, a classy product it is, with a bunch of external views and a flexibility of mission structure enabling the inventive player to try his hand at planning his own strategies for doing away with the enemy threat.

Also included in this game is an implementation of the real MiG's fly-by-wire system, an auto-stabilising device which prevents the plane from flicking around all over the place like a big girl's blouse. Most handy in combat.

Presented, surprisingly enough, in polygon graphics, MiG beats the competition on the ease-of-use front, even if it is a bit tricky to imagine it outlasting some of the more intense Microprose products. A winner.

☆☆☆☆

MIGHT AND MAGIC III: ISLES OF TERRA

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Role-Playing Game**
Publisher **New World Computing/US Gold**

"By my mighty sword of Zorak, I, Hagor Dragonbone, must smite the evil doom-legions of Krynn before the alignment of the six moon-worlds!" Yes, well, you get the general idea. Might And Magic III is yet another delve into the much-explored realms of FRP gaming, this time coming over as a cross between *Dungeon Master* and *The Bard's Tale*. Is it just me or has the whole FRP genre been done to death so badly that there's just nothing new anymore?

This third Might And Magic outing would seem to support that argument, as apart from some very flashy VGA visuals and soundboard sonics, there seems to be very little new or interesting on offer, except maybe for that ever-persistent fraternity of die-hard RPG fanatics. As you'd suspect, the scenario is about as hackneyed as one is ever going to get, with some claptrap about returning the Ultimate Power Orbs (mmm, yes!) to the King. What that involves is selecting a party of dwarves, orcs, heroes, warriors and all that, and then wandering about fighting with dragons, collecting treasure and picking up clues.

The game itself actually is very pretty, but for the most part the adventuring is pretty slow and insubstantial. Considering, however, how conditioned FRP gamers have become, I doubt that anybody who's likely to buy it will be disappointed by what they find.

☆☆☆

MONSTER BUSINESS

Price **Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Eclipse**

The mad meanies from the big forest have once again broken loose, and are searching for little items they can steal completely spoiling Mr Bob's construction site. Become Leroy, the best beast buster around and blow all these nasty little monsters sky high! A goal in life if ever there was one. Monster business, the epitome of the average arcade game features stupid graphics and a doubly stupid premise - to retrieve all the objects from the building site, Leroy must blow up all the monsters with some sort of fatal bicycle pump, causing them to inflate and eventually rise to the top of the screen, dropping all their objects as they go.

Despite the idiocy of the whole affair, Monster Business is actually quite good. Different screens each present a different sort of hazard, whether it be sliding platforms or a speedy time limit, and the player is so interested in trying to get the the end of the level that he probably won't realise quite how crass and daft the game is.

Smart graphics and it-could-only-be-German music help Monster Business rise about the pack and shine out as an example of what arcade games should be about. It's like an Abba record, if you know what I mean.

☆☆☆☆

NEBULUS 2

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **21st Century Entertainment**

Rising from the Hewson ashes like a phoenix looking exceptionally like whatever it was before it was burnt, 21st Century Entertainment aren't having much luck at the moment. Not only are they having some considerable difficulty with their Megadrive product, but the one game that looked like it could actually make them some money has turned out to be somewhat of a disappointment.

The European coders responsible for sequelling John Phillips' original classic have done a bit of a botch job, ruining the gameplay that made the first game so excellent by piling on lots of inane and useless power-up type features. The classic formula has been totally swamped by the sheer weight of these new 'ideas', and as such anybody who enjoyed the first game is likely to be very disappointed by this. However, it is quite pretty and, at least for those who haven't seen the first game, not a total washout on the playability front. But while the first game knew exactly where the addiction/frustration threshold was, Nebulus 2 steps over it like it wasn't even there. Not recommended.

☆☆

OUTRUN EUROPA

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **US Gold**

At long last! A game that has become a legend, along with the likes of *Star Trek* and *Birds of Prey*, over the last couple of years, simply because it's taken so bloody long to come out. The original idea was to release the product to cash in on the wave of euphoria from the original *OutRun* conversion - which should give you an idea of how long we've been waiting for it. We ended up getting the offiical sequel, *Turbo OutRun* first, which wasn't much cop, and now we've got this, which isn't either.

The basic idea is that the player has to take charge of a variety of vehicles - car, bike and boat - as he races over various land-and-sea stages to deliver a vital package, while international agents are out to stop you. It's all a bit ludicrous really, and what's seemingly supposed to be a cross between *OutRun* and *Chase H.Q.* with extra knobs on is in fact a bit of a shoddy mess. The road sections aren't much fun to play because control of the vehicles is so bloody oversensitive, and the enemy cars just keep on getting in the way in a way that isn't conducive to gameplay at all, but is just very frustrating. The boat bits don't even bear think about because they're so unjust and difficult, and 99% of players will probably put their foot through the monitor screen within five minutes of loading it up. Talking of loading, the constant disk accessing is a pain in the prostate, and it all hardly seems worth it when it's not even very clear what's actually going on in the game. There are far better race games available, so don't waste your precious time pondering over this one.

☆

PITFIGHTER

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Beat-'Em-Up**
Publisher **Domark**

If ever there's a prime example example of an excellent conversion of an average coin-op then Pitfighter is it. If you're an arcade goer then you're probably more than familiar with the game. With its giant monitor screen, three sets of player controls and stand-out digitised graphics you could hardly miss it. Trouble was, underneath the unique flashy visuals and meaty sound lurked a distinctly dull beat-'em-up, made even worse by the confusion caused by the grainy-looking graphics. Where's my bloke gone? Is he hitting me or not?

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You know the sort of thing. All in all, a less than rewarding experience.

In converting Pitfighter for the home systems, Teque London have actually improved it a Hell of a lot. Indeed, if you liked the coin-op, chances are you'll like the home game even more. The graphics, which have retained pretty much all of the flash special FX of the coin-op, are clearer, and the slower pace makes the game much easier to play. The joystick controls are a little uninstinctive, but it only takes a few goes to get the swing of things. But as good a conversion as it is, it still can't compensate for the fact that fundamentally Pitfighter's about as exciting as tapping a fire button all day. Which, er, in Pitfighter is pretty much what you spend all your time doing.

☆☆☆

RAILROAD TYCOON

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Strategy**
Publisher **MicroProse**

The ACE Benchmark game makes it's way onto the Amiga, and what a fine conversion it is! Building a railroad empire across the USA at the turn of the 20th Century may sound like hard work, but for those who like their strategy to run deep, Sid Meier's simulation of that very pursuit is fun Fun FUN! We know its difficult to imagine how, but trust us, it is. The feeling of power is paramount as you lay your track from sea to shining sea, conduct big-time business and generally earn loads of cash.

Beginning life as an entrepreneur in the early 1800s, you must turn a small stake into the biggest stake in railroad industry history ever! By taking control of every element in the decision making process which makes the railroad work, the player must handle tiny details as well as broader political and economic issues, all at the same time as competing either with a friend or against rival tycoons from history. And every element of the game is represented with top-quality graphics to make even the most number-crunchingly intense sections of the title easy to manage. Meier's excellent user interface and the sheer precision of the game design and balance compared with the top-notch power of the Amiga make this version of the game an outright winner. Highly recommended to all and sundry.

☆☆☆☆☆

RISE OF THE DRAGO

Price **Amiga £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

Amiga owners have been scrambling to become the first to purchase this- the first or a new wave of Sierra games helmed by the perennially popular Dynamix team. But they should be warned. While Amiga owners get to enjoy just as many visual thrills and plot twists as their PC Pals, they pay the price of swapping ten (count every last one as it slips in and out of your drive for the umpteenth time) disks.

However, if you're willing to pay the access-time price, Rise is an extremely rewarding product. The player takes the role of a futuristic detective, a real Marlowe type, slugging his way through a drug addled city of sleaze, the last remaining obstacle between the mysterious Dragon and total control of the entire planet! Played in first-person perspective, the game uses the no-typing-necessary control interface which Sierra have made their trademark.

This is another example of the interactive movie deal which American companies are so fond of forcing down our throats, but for once it isn't too bad. There is actually a story here! And there is actually some adventuring to do. The player must investigate the strange drug-related death of the Mayor's daughter, interrogate scummy criminals and do all the other stuff that private investigators have to do. Wire taps, opening other people's mail, hanging out in low-rent strip joints. What a life.

And it's all in those lovely hand drawn graphics. Mind you... all those disks...

☆☆☆☆

ROBIN HOOD

Price **IBM PC £30.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Millennium**

Mercilessly coat-tailing the publicity of the recent batch of Lincoln green movies, Millennium's completely unlicensed version of the tale is surprisingly entertaining.

Presented in *Populous* style, the game sticks to the classic storyline of Robin of Locksley being booted out of his lands by the evil Sherrif of Nottingham, deserted by his people and left to fend for himself.

The player, taking the title role of course, must assemble a band of merry men and set about doing away with the nasty old sheriff once and for all. An equally important goal for the player is to convince all the peasants and other inhabitants of the forest and its environs that Rob isn't the murdering thieving blaggard that the Sherrif has described to them but is a lovely kind hearted soul.

Aside from combat and object-seeking, there's a refreshing amount of genuinely funny dialogue in the game too, with the characters camping up their roles to the best of their ability.

It's an extremely enjoyable and innovative arcade adventure cum strategy cum role playing game who's worst failing could be that the plot is so familiar the player is compelled to play through to the very end as soon as he physically can, thus diminishing the appeal of return visits.

☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOD

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Millennium**

And about time too. Computer owners have been waiting a long time for a platform game good enough to wave in the faces of the smug console owners, revoltingly proud of their *Sonics* and their *Marios*. And here it is.

Robocod wins few awards for its originality. There are elements of just about every running n' jumping game from *Manic Miner* onwards in there somewhere, but thanks to careful design and wise mixing and matching of game styles the end result is far more than the sum of its parts.

As in *Mario IV*, the core game task is simple - get from one end of the level to the other, and jump on the heads of any bad guys to wander past. Of course, in practice there's a bit more to it than that. Some of the 70+ levels see Robocod travelling through the levels in a bouncing car, a spluttering prop plane and even an old enamelled bath! There are even some areas where 'Cod swims around - much like he did in the game's prequel *James Pond*.

In fact, it's the sheer variety of the game - along with the superbly smooth control over the fishy main character - that makes it such a joy to play. Every level features something new, either in graphics or gameplay, and there's little chance of boredom setting in. The wonderfully cute sprites, bright and cheerful backdrops and sing-alongable tunes are excellent too. All in all, Robocod is a polished, playable and - thank God - *fun* slice of platform pie that you'd have to be criminally insane to let slip by.

☆☆☆☆☆

ROBOCOP 3

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

Robocop? In 3D? Nah, it'd never work - would it? Well, the good news is that it does! Indeed, Digital Image Design's unique slant on the *Robocop 3* movie licence arguably make it the best tie-in yet.

In essence, Robocop 3 isn't *that* different from almost every other film tie-in. It's an amalgam of several game sequences - a bit of shoot-'em-up, a bit of driving, a bit of beat-'em-up - where the simplistic gameplay is compensated for by the sheer variety on offer. However, in this case there's another factor - DID's ground-breaking solid 3D.

Rather than watching some sprites leaping about a 2D backdrop, the player views the world through Robo's eyes as he patrols the streets of Old Detroit on foot, in a police car and even in the air thanks to his new Gyropack. The atmosphere generated, especially in the foot patrol sequences, is quite unbelievable. The only weak links in an otherwise incredibly-strong chain are a couple of feeble hand-to-hand combat sequences with a robotic Ninja assassion - the combat moves are limited and the action sluggish.

However, those sequences apart, there are frequent occasions during the game that the player actually does feel as if he is taking part in a film. And at the end of the day, isn't that what you should be buying a film tie-in for?

☆☆☆☆

RODLAND

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Platform**
Publisher **Storm**

Stomach-emptyingly cute it may be, but there's no denying that Rodland is a fine game. The Jaleco coin-op wasn't particularly noteworthy, finding itself adrift in a sea of graphically excellent games upon its release. Now, however, the conversion seems to have cropped up when the highest-profile cute game over the moment (*Magic Pockets*) has failed to meet expectations.

The player must work his way through a massive suite of screens, collecting points n' power ups and killing monsters with his rod (hence the name) by bashing them into the floor.

The end of each level is marked by the arrival of an enormous end of level bad guy such as an elephant, who, despite looking about as threatening as a big lump of cotton wool in a knitted bag will do for the players forthwith. Interestingly enough, the player can opt to play a girl if he/she wants, not that it makes much difference to the playing style. And to be honest, the 'boy' looks so bleeding effeminate you'd never know anyway.

Chock-a-block full of excellent visuals, Rodland is a fine conversion and it could even be argued to better its coin-op parent, as control over the characters has been improved. Certainly not a title for gamers into depth or gung-ho blasting, but a nonetheless worthwhile purchase for anyone else.

☆☆☆☆

SARAKON

Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £19.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Virgin Games**

Games which call the player stupid are unlikely to go down in history as great entertainers, yet Sarakon, despite making this fatal mistake is a perfectly decent rip-off of the *Mah Jong* tile-swapping business. Basically, if you imagine *Snap* played with some old oriental tablets and with some complicated 'can't do that' rules, then you're pretty close to imagining what Sarakon is all about.

The aim of the game is to click on similar tablets which sit in a particular orientation, eventually ending up with no tablets left, or at least as few as possible before the time limit runs out. Once done, the player is rewarded with a breakdown of his score and a comment from the computer as to his Sarakon ability.

The problem with these puzzle games, however, is that they all look similar enough to make the player want to pick them up and have a go, yet they insist on containing enough rule subtleties to make doing just that impossible. The result? The *Mah Jong* player will feel infuriated that he can't make his normal moves work.

The presentation is first class, apart from the cheesy sound effects and music which don't so much create the ambiance of the Far East as a grubby take-away in Dulwich.

If comparatively sedate mouse-clicking is your bag, and your eyes can stand staring at the monitor for ages while you scratch your head, Sarakon is the game for you.

☆☆☆

SECRET WEAPONS OF THE LUFTWAFFE

Price **IBM PC £40.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Lucasfilms/US Gold**

Deep, deep, deep. Secret Weapons of the Luftwaffe is a big old game and no mistake. It's also the sequel the critically acclaimed *Their Finest Hour*. The title comes packed with new goodies but brings the same problem of the first game; i.e. the flicky and rather horrible bitmap graphics.

The player is offered the chance to pilot aircraft in a seemingly limitless number of historical missions, shadowing or guarding planes and taking place in actual battles and scenarios of the Second World War.

However, played in a *Wing Commander* style with bitmaps taking the place of the polygons so frequently and successfully used in other flight sims, Luftwaffe will have all but the owners of the fastest machines hammering down the detail level in the attempt to get it to run at an acceptable rate. Ambitious players can then define their own missions to determine what history would have turned out like if there was just one less Messerschmitt BF109G in a particular combat situation. Luftwaffe is exactly the sort of game - as distinct from *Wing Commander* - that you actually want to make excuses for. And that's simply down to the fact that under the try-too-hard graphics which actually look pretty absurd every now and again, there is a quite brilliant game.

☆☆☆☆☆

SEVEN COLORS

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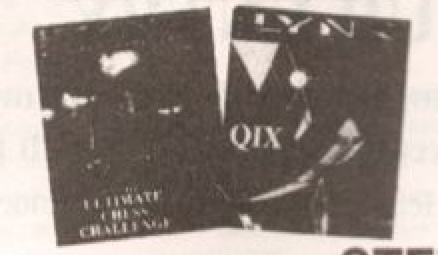

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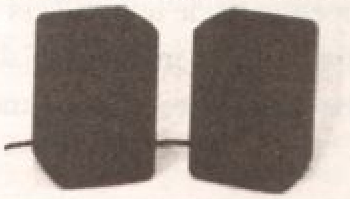

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Price **Atari ST/Amiga/IBM PC £25.99**
Genre **Puzzle**
Publisher **Infogrames**

Tetris, the game that started it all, may be getting on a bit now, but there's always room for a new puzzle game on the market. The only problem is that the vast majority of puzzlers that have been washing up on these shores from America and Europe have either been of unbearably low quality, or just too weird to get the head round.

Seven Colors from Infogrames, a company that prides itself on its off-the-wallness, fits snugly into the latter category. It's played over a large board made up of hundreds of tiny coloured diamonds where the objective is to change as many diamonds to your colour, spreading them like a virus across the screen, faster than your opponent does. The first player to fill 50% of the screen area is the winner. It's difficult enough to understand when you're actually playing the game, so don't worry if you're a little foggy after that brief explanation.

In fact the major problem with the game is that it's not very easy to understand, and because things just seem to happen it's not very easy to keep track, or indeed to work out what's going on at all. The confusing situation is further compounded because the instructions hardly explain anything at all. Persistent players may well get something out of it however, and there's a variety of game options to spice up the action if they do. Oh, and there's some very nice in-game classical music which suits the nature of the game perfectly and is very soothing indeed. In fact even if you get bored of the game, it's worth loading up every now again just for its therapeutic aural qualities.

☆☆

SILENT SERVICE II

Price **Amiga £35.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Microprose**

It may have taken five years, but the sequel to one of the most critically acclaimed and publicly admired sim games is finally with us. Silent Service II features all the best bits from the first game as well as a host of original and new doo-dads.

Digitised graphics and sampled sounds simply confirm the Service as a game which is undoubtedly one of the most detailed, accurate and realistic on the market, but new gamers should be warned that, just like life on a real submarine, it's not all walking, er, action.

No. There's a lot of the old *Above Us The Waves* stuff with turning off engines to sneak up on enemy warships without alerting their radar. And as for all that tank blowing stuff. I ask you!

Microprose are indubitably the outright kings of all things sim., but their policy of increasing the action and minimising the dial-watching as used to such good effect in *F-15 Strike Eagle II* would be well extended to this particular title.

For gamers wishing to purchase an accurate sub simulation, rest assured, there is absolutely none better. But those expecting to get their torpedoes off straight away would be better to wait for a more accessible equivalent.

☆☆☆☆☆

SMASH TV

Price **Amiga £25.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Ocean**

"Good luck - you're gonna need it" screams the show's oily compere, and never have there been truer words said. This conversion of the incredibly violent Williams coin-op has translated surprisingly well to the home systems, with nearly all the blood and thunder elements so beloved of the original ported across faithfully.

The game takes the form of a futuristic game show, where one or two contestants armed with a rapid-fire gun slug it out with a seemingly endless parade of thugs, freaks and goons to win big money and prizes in a single-screen arena. Power-ups and end-of-zone bad guys add to the already phenomenal carnage.

On a purely visceral level, it's immensely satisfying as the plugged opponents explode into red gobbets of flesh. Indeed, the sprites are small enough to be almost anybody you want them to be, so you can imagine that you're shooting up endless clones of your boss if you want to. Very therapeutic.

As a single-player game it's fine, though there's a serious risk that boredom may well set in worryingly early. The two-player game, on the other hand, is something else. There's not been player-to-player shouting like this

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since *Kick Off 2*.

The coin-op's two joysticks (one to move, one to direct fire) have translated adequately to a single controller, though if you have two there is an option to use both which makes the game far better.

A superb conversion, and more than deserving of your hard-earned pennies. Go to it, you psycho you!
☆☆☆☆

THUNDERHAWK

Price **Amiga £30.99**
Genre **Simulation**
Publisher **Core Design**

Most flight sims require a good deal of practice before any reward can be garnered from them. All those keyboard controls and miscellaneous aircraft functions do quite a lot to put off anyone looking for a quick blast. Core Design have seen this gap in the market and more than adequately filled it with Thunderhawk. All control is via the mouse, which makes everything, from weapon selection to helicopter control, quick and easy. It's a welcome change from the usual memory test of clicks and non-clicks.

The game itself is broken down into a series of campaigns, each preceded by a graphic briefing sequence indicating target and terrain type. Before taking to the sky the player must select the appropriate armament for the Thunderhawk, although there's a default if this seems to much of a chore.

What makes the game a treat is the handling of the helicopter. The controls make flying intuitive, letting the player get on with the mission rather than battling to stay airborne. Graphics are smooth and move at a fair click, though there isn't much background scenery. If you've never been tempted to try a flight sim, then this is the game to change your attitude.
☆☆☆☆☆

UTOPIA

Price **Amiga £29.99**
Genre **Arcade Strategy**
Publisher **Gremlin**

The quality of life on earth, let's face it, sucks. And the world is screwed up so bad that nothing anyone can do can save it. We need to start again.

This is the premise of Utopia, another *Populous/Powermonger* style affair. Except this time the aim, rather than simply ruling a world or conquering it is to construct and run it and to make all its inhabitants feel really good! The aim is to elevate the quality of life to 100% - Utopia.

It's not difficult to grasp the aims and controls of the game. And it quickly becomes apparent that there are lots of problems thrown up by the idea of making everyone happy. For a start, if you spend all the money on hospitals, food production and month-long sports festivals, your populace will be content, but without any credible defence when the inevitable computer-controlled alien attack occurs.

Beginning from just a few key buildings, it's up to the player to construct the colony using icon-driven actions while inspecting the world in isometric 3D. There are almost no rules in this society. You can run things virtually any way you want.

The only factor that is missing is the option to try and run things as a dictatoeship regime and make a certain part of the population very happy while keeping the workers ground down into the dirt. Still, that never works, does it?
☆☆☆☆☆

VOLFIED

Price **Atari ST/Amiga £24.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Empire**

Qix is back in town, and better than ever! No matter how widely tastes may differ among the gamesplaying fraternity, you'd be hard pushed to find anybody who doesn't enjoy a game of good old *Qix*. Its appeal is universal because it's so simple and addictive, and like *Breakout*, its gameplay has stood the test of time. What Volfied (converted from Taito's coin-op) represents is a 90s version of the original classic - it is to *Qix* what *Arkanoid* was to *Breakout*, keeping the original framework intact, but adding lots of pretty backdrops, power-ups and extra features.

For the most part it's much the same - draw boxes around the screen to fill up 75% or more of the screen area without the fusewire which makes up the line itself getting hit by any of the marauding enemies - which, instead of the old gyrating line, now takes the form of a giant mothership that roams about spitting about bullets, and a couple of pesky little helpers. Lasers and speedups are among the collectables, while high-tech backgrounds and SFX provide the aesthetic overhaul.

Since *Qix*-style games are so thin on the ground, Volfied, with its classy execution and uncluttered gameplay is a welcome addition to the software scene - and if you've got any sense and admiration for the classics, you'll add it your collection too.
☆☆☆☆

VROOM

Price **Atari ST £24.99**
Genre **Racing Game**
Publisher **Lankhor**

Without wanting to be nasty to our European counterparts, what with 1992 and all that, it has to be said that most of the software that crosses over from the continent is a bit smelly. Vroom, however, from French publisher Lankhor, has proven itself to be the exception to the rule. Although it's not a patch on the likes of *Indianapolis 500* or *Formula One Grand Prix*, Vroom is nevertheless a jelly supper racing game, boasting very impressive speed as the player vrooms his way (hence the name) around a first-person environment.

It's got all the usual fixtures and fittings - rear-view mirrors, pit-stops, overhead maps,bridges, dips and hills on the track, training modes, qualifying laps, choice of courses and some spectacular crash sequences. It's more ofa racing game than simulation, as controls and instrumentation has been kept to a minimum - there's nothing too much to worry about here apart from going very fast, avoiding the other cars and keeping on the road. And it works well enough, being very playable and actually quite compulsive, with the array of racing options adding to the game's longevity. The only dodgy factor is that the joystick option is restricted to the arcade mode - the more serious race options only allow mouse control. Very dodgy indeed. But apart from that, not at all bad.
☆☆☆☆

WILLY BEAMISH

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Adventure**
Publisher **Dynamix/Sierra On-Line**

The Adventures of Willy Beamish, to give it its full name, is somewhat of a oddity. Dubbed an 'interactive cartoon', it's sort of a weird cross between *The Wonder Years* and *The Simpsons*. Willy is the typical all-American troublemaking pre-teen schoolkid, complete with grubby hands, pet frog and accordingly stereotypical family. Strange things are afoot in suburb of Frumpton, and Willy must investigate.

Willy is yet another of those games that sounds a whole lot better than it actually is. That's not to say that it's bad, but the gameplay is very trial-and-error, with luck often playing more of a part than skill or judgment. As such, more time is spent restoring saved games than actually playing, and it can get quite frustrating at times, especially when you have to sit through the comical set-piece for the umpteenth time. As an interactive cartoon, it's excllent, with suitably stereotypical characters, some funny jokes and gorgeous visuals. As a game it's compelling, but not in a way that encourages real addiction or involvement. You're unlikely to come back to again and again.
☆☆☆☆

WING COMMANDER II

Price **IBM PC £34.99**
Genre **Arcade Blast**
Publisher **Origin**

No matter what else you might say about the Wing Commander games, they look darned good. The trouble is, there isn't really much else to say about them. Well, perhaps that's a little harsh but here in the sequel to the much talked-about and little-played original, it's very much a case of more of the same.

Interstellar war with the Kilrathi continues, and in the most recent Kilrathi victory, the Confederation flagship Tiger's Claw has been destroyed by invisible Kilrathi stealth fighters. As the sole survivor of the assault, the player must first convince his federation comrades that the attack did genuinely take place and then lead a federation force to track them down and destroy them.

Graphically excellent although particularly processor heavy, Wing Commander II certainly isn't a brilliant game. It's a worthy sequel to its predecessor but is the sort of title where that trite old phrase about trying before buying is 100% appropriate.
☆☆☆

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1) How old are you (tick as appropriate)?
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13 ☐
14 ☐
15 ☐
16 ☐
17-18 ☐
19-20 ☐
21-25 ☐
26-30 ☐
Over 30 ☐

2) Are you:
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3) How frequently do you buy ACE?
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Every issue ☐

4) Which computer(s) do you own?
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Game Boy ☐
Other (please specify)
....

5) Which, if any, do you intend to buy within the next 6 months?

....
....
....

6) Where do you buy your games?
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7) How much do you spend on games software each month?
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£26-£50 ☐
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8) Do you intend to purchase any of the following over the next 6 months?
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Second disk drive ☐
Mouse ☐
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Digitizer ☐

9) Which type of games do you prefer - examples are in brackets -? (You can tick more than one)
Arcade Blast (Swiv) ☐
Arcade Adventure (Gods) ☐
Sport Simulation (Snooker) ☐
Sports Arcade (Kick Off 2) ☐
Strategy (Civilization) ☐
Beat 'em-up (IK+) ☐
Racing Game (Stunt Car) ☐
Racing Simulation (Formula 1) ☐
Simulation (Chuck Yeager) ☐
Role Playing Games ☐
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10) What other magazines do you read regularly?
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11) How many people other than yourself will read this issue of ACE?
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2 ☐
3 ☐
4-6 ☐
7 or more ☐

12) Which of these games publishers do you consider to be the best?
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Ocean ☐
Gremlin ☐
Image Works/Mirrorsoft ☐
Microprose ☐
Psygnosis ☐
Virgin ☐
Sierra-on-Line ☐
Accolade ☐
Core Design ☐

13) Score the following features in ACE from 1 to 10 (10 being the best)
News ☐
Letters ☐
In The Works ☐
Gary Whitta's Previews ☐
The 6-Page Screentest ☐
The Console Pages ☐
The Reviews Directory ☐

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Own an ST or Amiga? Hands up if you've completed all of your games. Hmmm, not many. Well maybe "The Directory" is for you. With cheats for over 250 games, it's a snip at £3.00. Send an A5 SAE with Cheque/PO to: Alex Barley 80 George Street, Maulden Bedfordshire MK45DD.

PENPALS

Amiga Atari and VHS contact wanted worldwide. USA especially. Write to Mark 140 Malmesbury Road London E3. No Lamers!!

the blitter end

Ever since Bullfrog Productions' granite-jawed programmer Sean Cooper stepped onto the catwalk in the Clothes Show Model of the Year finals (as reported in the Blitter last month), it seems that all manner of games designers and proggers are queuing up to follow in his footsteps by getting a bit of tasty TV exposure for themselves.

The latest to jump on the media bandwagon is equally hunky and swoon-inducing coder Archer Maclean, who popped in to do a guest spot on ITV's oh-so trendy Saturday morning kidz' show Motormouth this month.
Officially he was there to punt his latest game, the rather jolly Jimmy White's Whirlwind Snooker, but that didn't stop him getting in a few smouldering looks to camera (if not exactly the right camera - it's the one with the red light on, Arch) and generally sending the female members of the audience into a state of eyebrow-fluttering ecstacy. It was probably all that talk about microns and mathematical formula - that always gets the birds going. Blitter would like to clarify a couple of things, however. One, if Archer's game is so bloody clever, how come weedy presenter Andy Crane beat it in a head-to-head potting race? And two, why did Virgin only give Motormouth TWO copies of the game to give away in the competition? Mind how you go, lads, your generosity will get be bankrupt at this rate...

* * *

Every now and again, Blitter is reminded just what a roistering bunch of boys the software industry is comprised of. At a recent computer show in Cologne, a trio of top-level delegates from three of the leading software houses decided to have a night on the town - apparently drunkenly meandering around the hotel and filling the lifts up with chairs from the lobby proved to be less than satisfying and they sought entertainment of a boogying nature.

Unfortunately, when they tried to get into the hotel's nightclub, they were turned away at the door by a hefty bouncer on the account of the fact that they were wearing jeans. So, while one of them argued the toss with the doorman, the other two trotted off, removed their jeans and came back in only their pants. And although this was obviously hilarious, the legendarily humourless German doorman was less than amused and then proceeded to stick one on the third member of the group! The real twist is that while the punched one ran off to the hotel to put some ice on his squished nose, the other two put some proper trousers on and were actually let into the club!

* * *

Talking of dodgy goings-on at shows, word reaches us of a very interesting story concerning a certain member of a high-profile programming team. Apparently, while at a games exhibition in France, our celeb found himself temporarily strapped for cash on a night when he was supposed to be going out on the town. So, in desperate need of funds, he took a bunch of T-shirts, scrawled his autograph on each one and knocked them out to starstruck French punters for a hundred francs - £10 in real money - a time! Our man apparently did a roaring trade, and before the night was out had enough quids in his bin to have a right rollicking night out. It just goes to show what you can do when you put your mind to it. Sir John Harvey Jones had better watch out...

* * *

Call us old fashioned, but here at ACE we've always assumed that the only way a game could get a Trailblazer award was for the magazine to give it one. This little point is obviously far too stale and old hat for progressive software house Core Design, who went ahead and stuck a Trailblazer logo on its advertising for viking game Heimdall, even though it only scored 895 last month and therefore didn't receive one. We toyed briefly with the idea of not giving Core's latest, Wolfchild, the Trailblazer it deserves so as to even the score a bit. But Art Editor Jim had already coloured it in, so we didn't have the heart to take it out.

* * *

Over the last few months, Blitter has learned a very important lesson - if you get invited to any kind of Mirrorsoft party or function, DON'T GO. They're jinxed. Initially we thought it was just an isolated incident when a certain member of the ACE team had a bit of extremely bad luck a few months back at a Mirrorsoft dinner. But then word reaches us that Amiga Power editor Matt Bielby and Sega Power dep-ed Neil "Tesco's" West also seem also to have the dreaded Curse of Mirrors upon them.

Returning from a Mirrorsoft bash a few months back, the pair were ambushed (and thoroughly outnumbered, we are told) by a group of muggers and roughed up. And only this month, while on the way home from another Mirrorsoft party during Future Publishing's World of Commodore Show, the hapless pair were set upon once again. This time a mysterious solitary Scotsman set about the fiesty duo, dealing out a couple of wobbly-leg inducing knuckle sandwiches. This, we feel, makes Neil and Matt the most unsuccessful tag team in software history. If you read any reviews by them of Ocean's WWF over the next couple of months, don't pay any attention because they obviously don't know what they're talking about.

* * *

Staying with Mirrorsoft for a bit longer, it seems that not everyone who has contact with the company is completely unlucky. Take the aforementioned Commodore Show party for instance. Though a generous amount of money was put behind the bar, it didn't take long for it to get drunk. Actually, it didn't take anybody very long to get drunk. But anyway, the story is when the free booze finally ran out and the drinks started costing, the poor little waifs at Strangeways Software couldn't afford to get another round in.

A hasty whip-round yielded only two out-of-date Travelcards, a Fruit Pastille and three pence in real money. But never fear! All that was required was a quick trip over to see Mirrorsoft's roly-poly Marketing Director Sean Brennan, and suddenly the boys were back in business. Big-hearted Sean whipped out his wad and peeled off two crisp twenties of his own money for the boys to go and have a drink with. It seems Captain Cash's days are numbered. So if you're short of a few bob, why not give Sean a call at the usual Mirrorsoft number and no doubt he'll be happy to give you some free money.

* * *

Andrew Braybrook has written a new game! Unfortunately you won't be able to play it - unless of course you trot along to a new exhibition that's being organised by Powergen. It's all to do with a new power station that's being opened by David Bellamy or something. It's called RoboPower, and you have to run around this power station collecting coal and stuff - you know the sort of thing. So there you go.

* * *

We just remembered something else about Neil from out of Sega Power. He's so unlucky that he can't even get into his own party! Once again, it all happened at the Commodore Show, when organisers Future were staging an ultra-exclusive and chic party in the London Dungeons for their top industry mates. Though everyone knew invites were intended for top geezers only, Neil was apparently shooting his mouth off about how he was going to get in, no sweat. But when he turned up on the night, Future top boys Greg Ingham and Steve Carey steadfastly refused to let him in! But never mind, we're sure he had lots of other hot industry parties to go to. And as an added bonus, Neil is now honourably enrolled in the Tom Watson order of Unsuccessful Party Gatecrashers.

● Blit Blit!

Look out - he's back!

PAPERBOY 2

No window is safe. No fence is too high. The paperboy is determined to deliver the paper to his subscribers any way he can. Tossing papers left and right, riding in three directions, jumping anything, this free-wheeling carrier visits more neighbourhoods and houses, faces more targets and obstacles, in more vivid colours than ever before.
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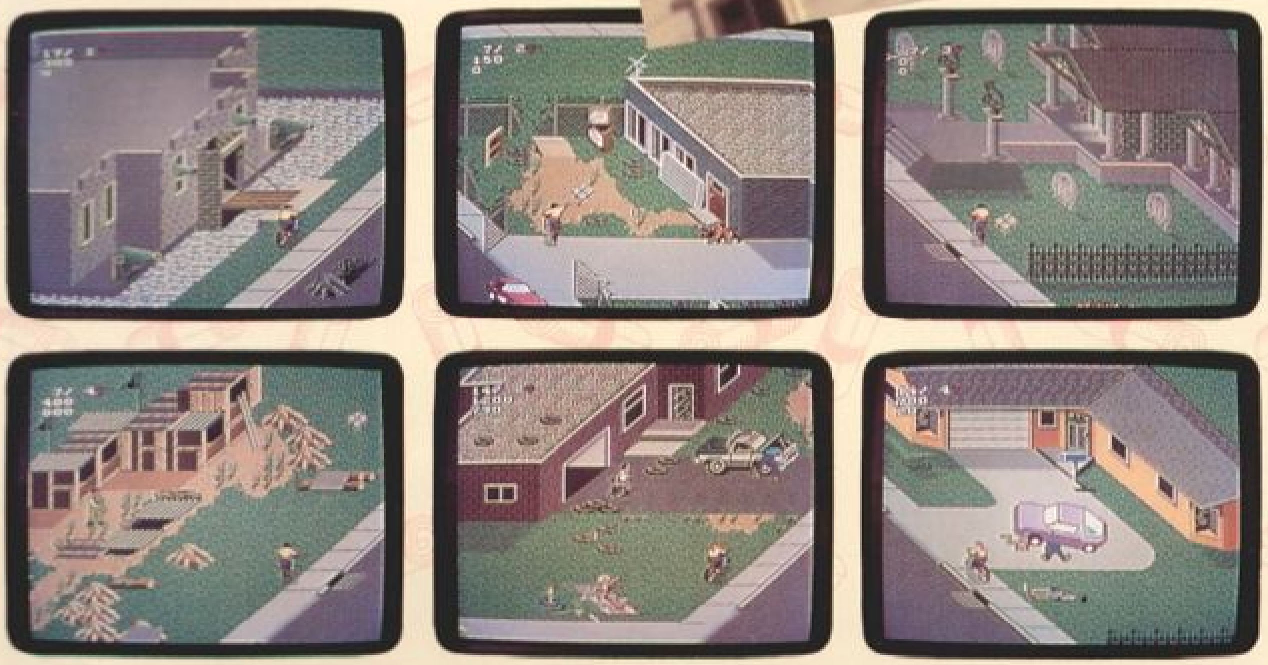

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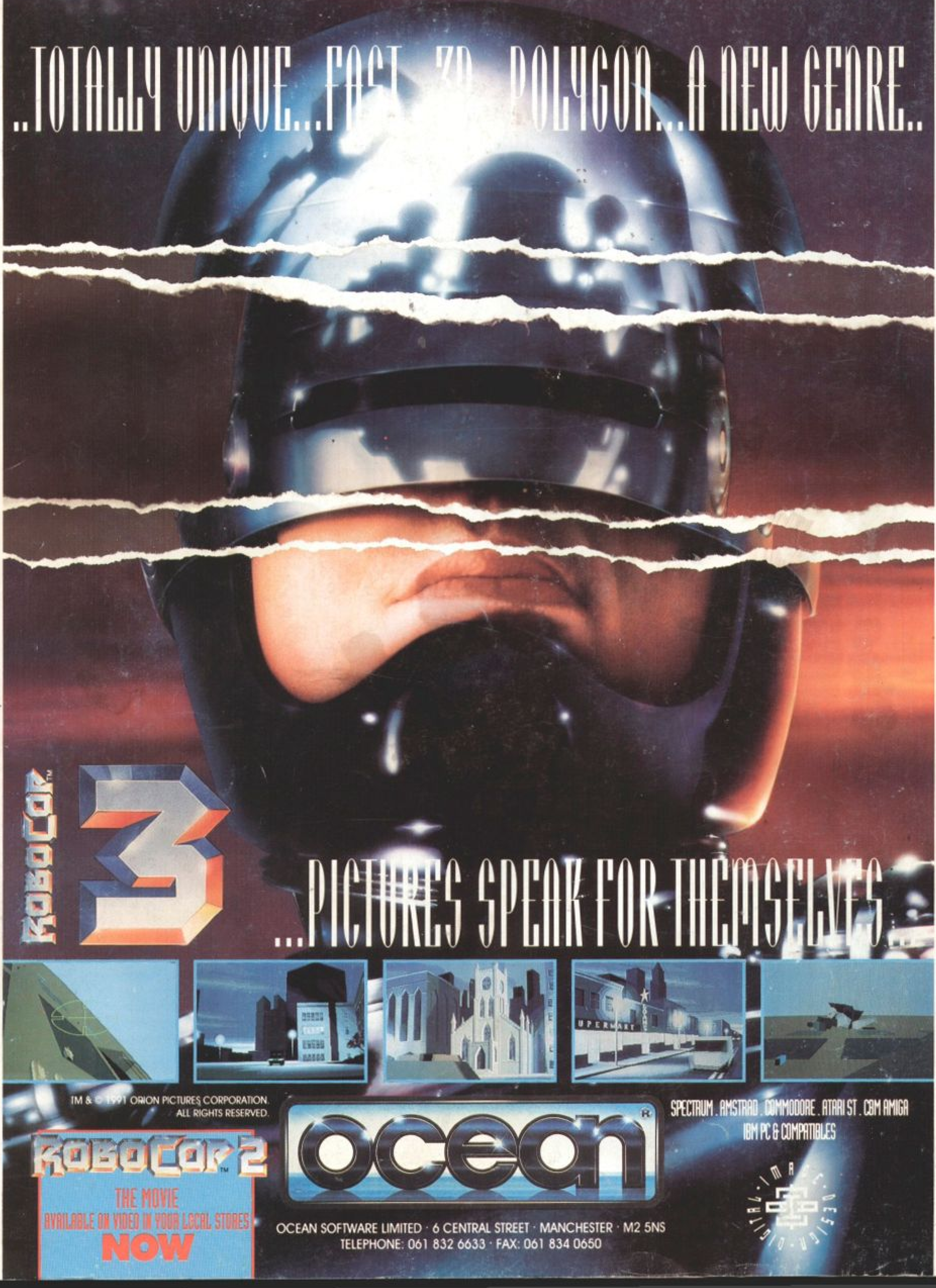
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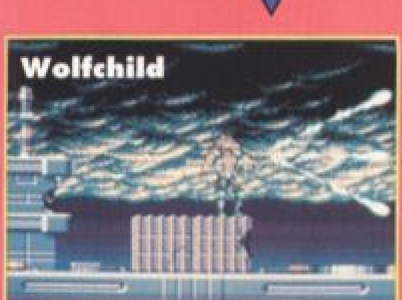
A D V A N C E D C O M P U T E R E N T E NT

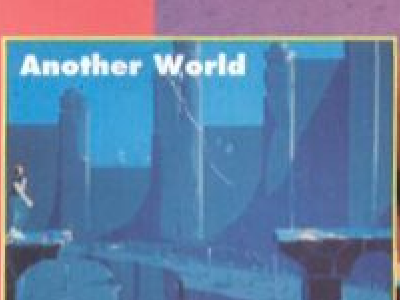
WOLFCHILD

Exclusive Review

6-PAGE Screen Tests!

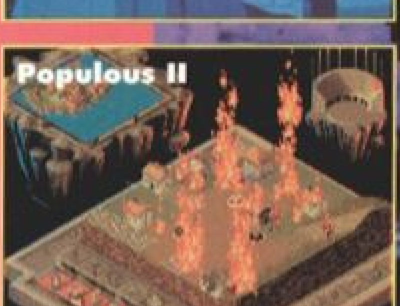


Wolfchild



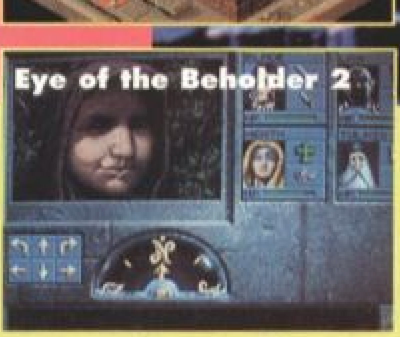
Another World

Epic



Populous II

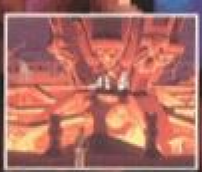
First Samurai

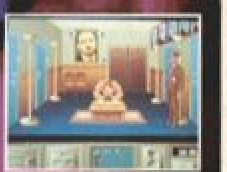


Eye of the Beholder 2

PREVIEWED:

Indiana Jones 4, KGB, Bodycount, Gameboy Populous, Fire & Ice, Special Forces and many more!





IN THE WORKS:

Cyberfight - Big fighting robots from Electronic Arts
ATAC - Microprose bust the Columbian drug lords
Apocalypse - Helicopter hell from Image Works

FREE!

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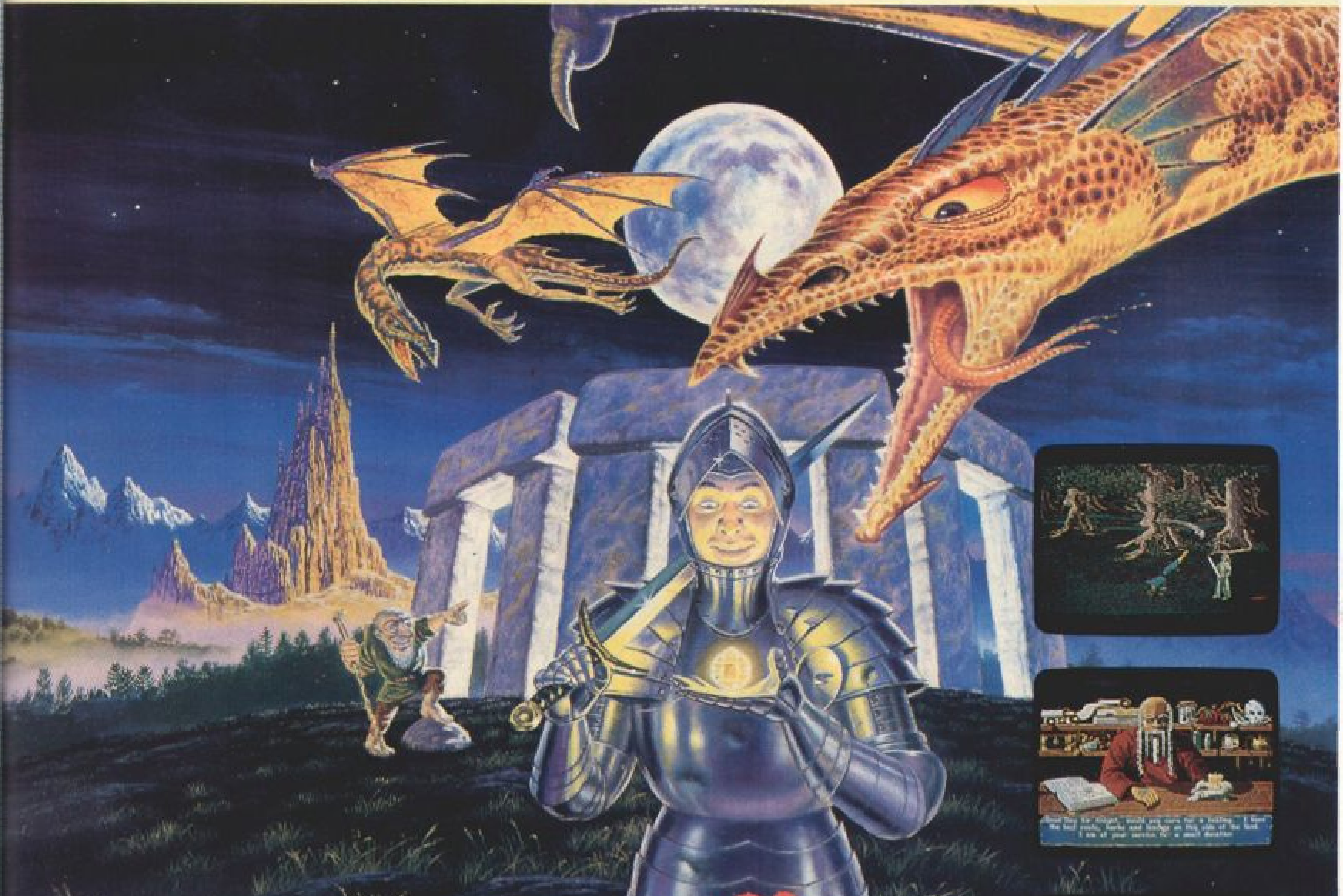
MOONSTONE

A HARD DAYS KNIGHT



SO MUCH FUN –YOU'LL DIE!

Moonstone - a remarkable combination of fast, aggressive combat action and subtle role-play set in a fantasy world, that uniquely challenges your brain and your reflexes - while covering you in gore.

Oh, by the way, if the sight of so much blood upsets you, don't worry. The blood is an option!

Moonstone features nearly 1,000 frames of incredible animation in 2 Megabytes of monsters and creatures, over 60 beautifully painted backdrops and detailed scenery. Sound effects are high quality digital samples and includes a full musical score and stunning full screen animated introductory and game complete sequences.

12

Moonstone contains scenes of strong graphic imagery with particular realism. Although these scenes are optional, this product is voluntarily rated 12. Parental Guidance is recommended for younger players, however this is not a legal requirement.

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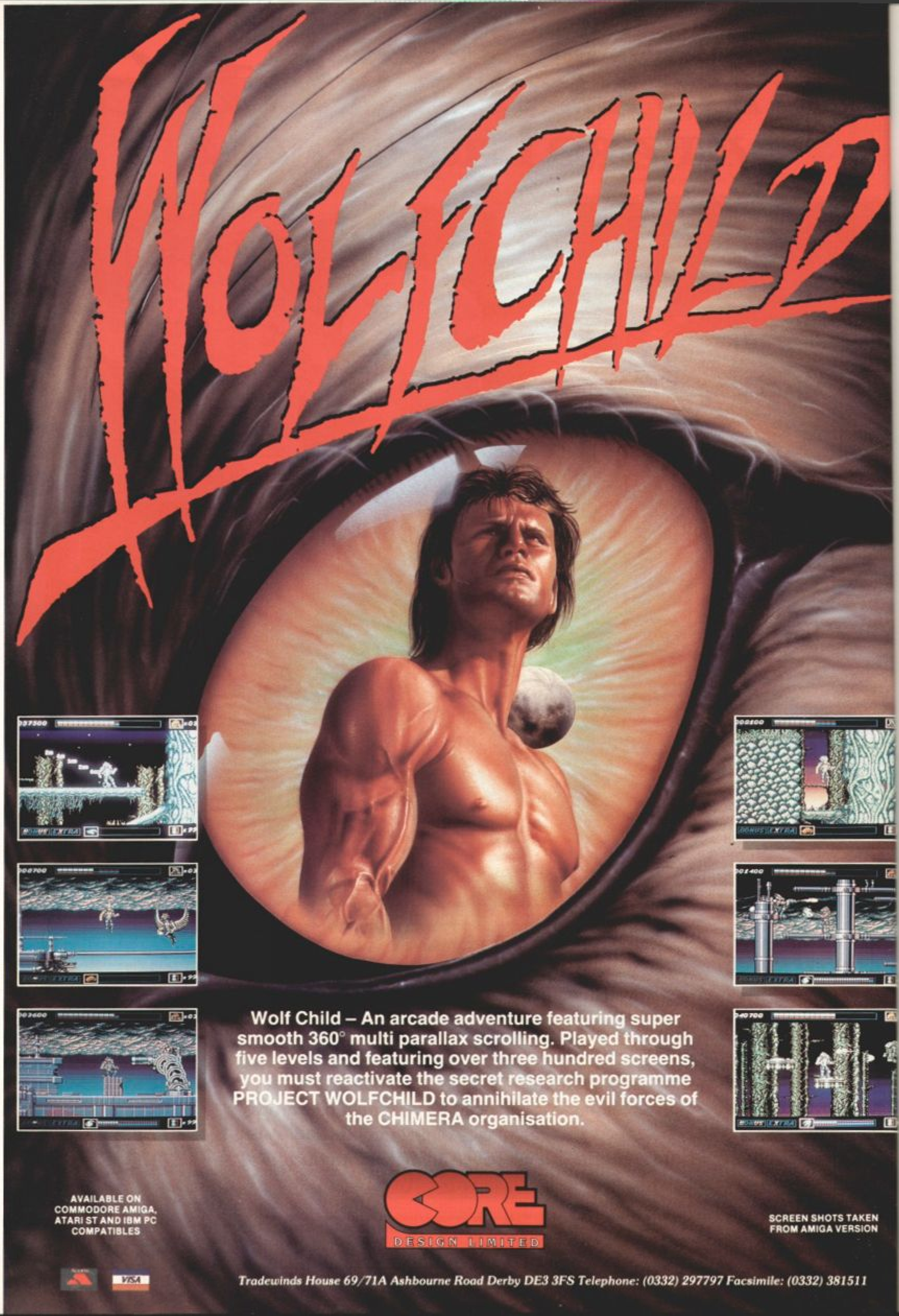

Wolf Child – An arcade adventure featuring super smooth 360° multi parallax scrolling. Played through five levels and featuring over three hundred screens, you must reactivate the secret research programme PROJECT WOLFCHILD to annihilate the evil forces of the CHIMERA organisation.

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ARCADE BLAST

SWIV (Storm)

The follow-up to *Silkworm* succeeds through a combination of frenetic speed, polished presentation and sheer, unadulterated action. Tons and tons of it. The firepower and wastage on screen is of a level that far exceeds anything offered before. A £25 coin-op with no coins!

ARCADE ADVENTURE

GODS (Renegade)

While it may be argued that it's not as intrinsically sophisticated as the likes of *Rick Dangerous 2* or *Prince of Persia*, the Bitmap Brothers' platform opus does offer enough fully-rounded arcade action to make it the outright winner in this category. Classy and depthy.

ROLE PLAYING GAMES

EYE OF THE BEHOLDER (US Gold/SSI)

By the mighty sword of Kring! SSI's latest *Dungeons and Dragons* game takes the best bits of *Dungeon Master*, adds a few more its own, stirs well, and the result is the best yet for gamers into the whole fantasy genre. Will SSI rule the RPG land forever?

SPORTS ARCADE

KICK OFF 2 (Anco)

What can we say? It's pretty pointless trying to explain to the initiated what makes Kick Off 2 so damned playable, but the primary reasons are untra-instrinctive ball control mode and remarkable speed which combine to make it as exciting as the real game!

STRATEGY

CIVILIZATION (Microprose)

Sid Meier's Railroad Tycoon is deposed as the strategy benchmark by - would you believe it - another game by Sid Meier! This awesome strategy epic has the player leading a race of people through technological and cultural expansion as the civilisation develops through the ages. Heavyweight stuff, and a work of undisputed genius.

ADVENTURE

THE SECRET OF MONKEY ISLAND (US Gold/Lucasfilm)

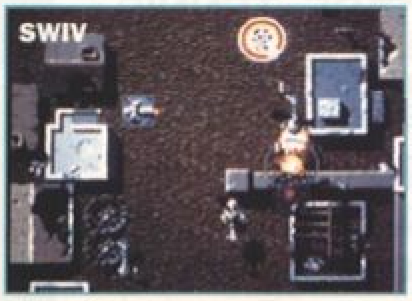
Partly due to the new refined version of the SCUMM adventure system and partly due to the excellent, and very funny script, this is the most engaging and entertaining adventure game for years. But will Monkey Island 2 take its crown?

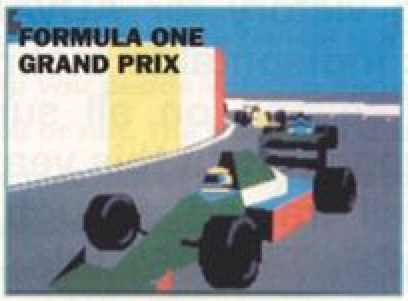
ACE BENCHMARKS

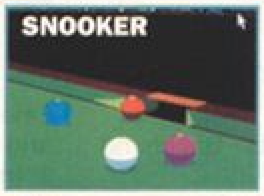
The games listed here are the very best of their particular genre. The benefits of your being fully acquainted with our Benchmarks are twofold.

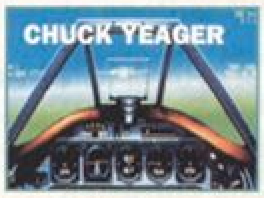
The Benchmarks provide a solid reference point when it comes to games buying time. By glancing at our description of the benchmark, you'll be able to decide if particular differences in the new game's design would make the new title more or less appealing for you.

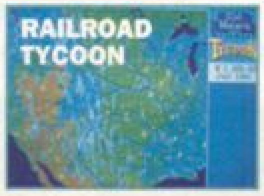
Also, no software collection is complete unless it contains *all* the games listed here. If you're missing any of these titles, go and remedy the situation immediately.

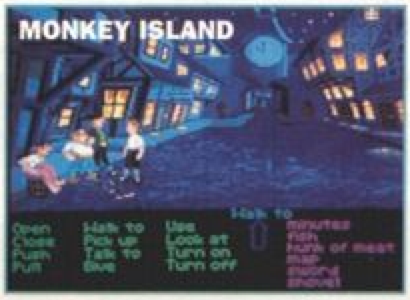


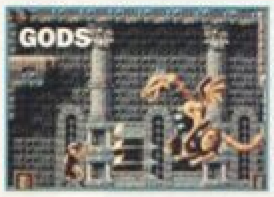


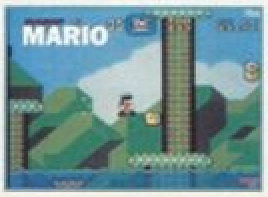












RACING SIMULATION

FORMULA ONE GRAND PRIX (Microprose)

A new Benchmark! So perfect it's almost impossible to find any fault in this awesome game from Geoff Crammond. Packed with helpful pointers for novices and lots of detail for experienced racers, it will keep you driving for *years*.

BEAT'EM UP

IK+ (System 3)

An upgraded and enhanced version of the original System 3 classic, Archer Maclean's IK+ is still unchallenged in its field after three years. Its most innovative spect is the addition of a third, computer controlled fighter. Incredible speed and subgames.

RACING GAME

STUNT CAR RACER (Microstyle)

Stunt Car Racer packs polygon-plotting power and arcade-speed thrills into a novel formula. Drive around elevated raceways, smashing and crashing your opponent into oblivion. Growling audio and a weird look add novelty value to this class title.

SPORTS SIMULATION

JIMMY WHITE'S WHIRLWIND SNOOKER (Virgin)

Archer Maclean does it again, and must go down in the history books as having produced the first ever realistic snooker game. Tremendous 3D combines with authentic play and more options than ever believed possible. An awesomely good game.

SIMULATION

CHUCK YEAGER'S AIR COMBAT(Electronic Arts)

The third game to be endorsed by the barrier-breaking General takes place in a far more enjoyable combat arena. You get to fly every plane you've ever dreamt of and you get to fight every plane you ever thought of too. And all in super sprite'n'polygons graphics!

ACTION STRATEGY

MEGA lo MANIA (Image Works)

Sensible Software's first attempt at strategy is a surprisingly successful one. At first glance, it may seem similar to *Populous*, but further inspection reveals it to be a genuinely original strategy epic. But will *Populous 2*, due next month, end Mega's brief reign

PUZZLE GAME

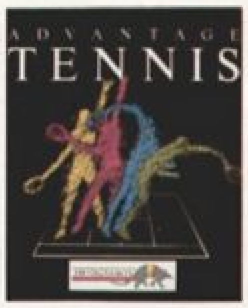
TETRIS (Nintendo)

There are more official versions of this classic than can be counted on the legs of a millipede. But it's Nintendo's own Gameboy version that is undoubtedly the best. Line up blocks in frenetic black & white action May sound dull but is actually fantastic.

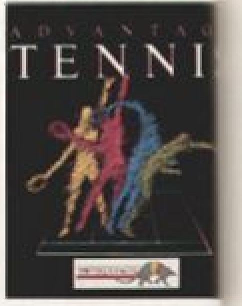
PLATFORM

SUPER MARIO WORLD (Nintendo)

The sooner they release the Famicom over here the better, as that will give more chance to experience the stunning fourth instalment in the saga. Sheer perfection from start to end of its ninety-nine levels! By the way, have you seen that advert with Mario reading the news? It's good isn't it? He's better than that Sega git anyday.



ADVANTAGE TENNIS



Monday, 3rd of November 1991 THE NEWSPAPER OF CHAMPION GAMES. ★ 1st year N# 00000

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Another crushing victory for ADVANTAGE TENNIS over its rivals. Its indisputable technical superiority was proved last season on all surfaces. Like us, Tennis World is wondering if this year, there will be a player who is well trained enough to succeed in taking ADVANTAGE TENNIS' title and becoming Number 1.

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A CHAMPION'S PORTRAIT

- 1 or 2 simultaneous players.
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- 3 game types: training, season or exhibition.
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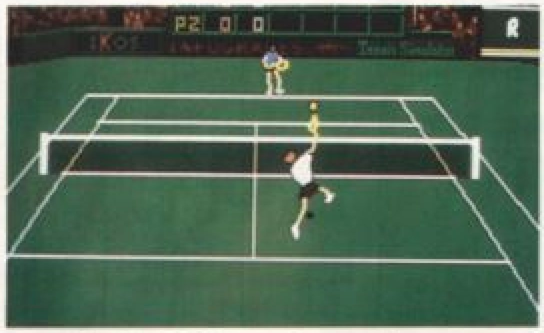
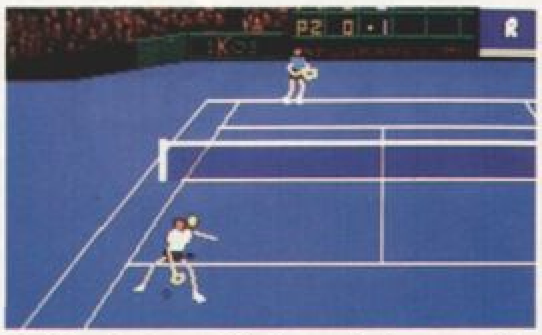
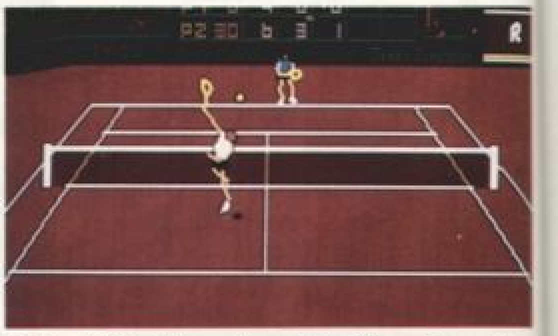
- Different view angles.



Marvellous high smash on the grass of Wimbledon.



Terrific between-the-legs-stroke on the synthetic surface of Tokyo.



Splendid backhand smash at the net on clay at Roland Garros.

SKI TENNIS FOOTWEAR GOLF
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